

# God Restores His People

A study in the book of Ezra

Andrew Swango

## **Book of Ezra - Introduction**

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### **AUTHOR**

Traditionally, it is Ezra who may have also wrote the Chronicles. Ezra appears to be a well-versed historian. After all, he doesn't appear in his book until chapter 7.

### **DATE**

Ezra first appears in chapter 7. This occurred in 458 BC (Ezra 7:8). We know that he lived well into the time of Nehemiah (Neh 12). Based on the dates in Nehemiah, he would have lived after 430 BC. So he would have lived earlier and later than 458-430 BC.

As to the date of him writing his book, the same dates could be given except that it could not have been before 458 BC, when he arrived in Jerusalem.

### **AUDIENCE**

The audience is anyone. This is a book of history, so it is meant to last for anyone to read.

### **STYLE**

The style is historical.

### **THIS CLASS**

#### **Style**

Being an historical document more than anything else, the style of this class will focus on the events and the people in this book. Who where they? When did they live? There will not be a whole lot of application. Being one of the most non-chronological books of the Bible, great efforts are put into where all the passages fit chronologically.

#### **Theme: Restoration**

The theme of this class will be on the restoration of the Jews from captivity. It includes their waves of captives that return, the rebuilding of the temple, and their renewed commitment to God.

Ezra 3:1-2, "By the seventh month, the Israelites had settled in their towns, and the people gathered together in Jerusalem. Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers and the priests along with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his brothers began to build the altar of Israel's God in order to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God."

Other Scriptures that show the restoration of the Jews: Ezra 1:7, 2:1, 2:63, 2:68, 3:1-13.

## Book of Ezra - Outline

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Note: For a chronological order of the events in Ezra, see my class notes on The Jews Under Persia.

- 1:1-11** Cyrus the Great
  - 1:1-4 Cyrus' decree to build the temple.
  - 1:5-11 Jews prepare to return and are given gifts.
- 2:1-70** Zerubbabel and company return to Judah
  - 2:1-2a The leaders of the journey to Judah.
  - 2:2b-20 Totals of all the men by family.
  - 2:21-35 Totals of all the men by city.
  - 2:36-58 Totals of all the men by duty.
  - 2:59-63 Totals of all the men without ancestry.
  - 2:64 Totals of all men.
  - 2:65-67 Totals of slaves, singers, and animals.
  - 2:68-70 The people arrive in Judah and give the gifts to the temple.
- 3:1-7** Altar is built; sacrifices restored.
  - 3:1-2 Altar is built.
  - 3:3-6 Sacrifices resumed.
  - 3:7 Preparing to lay the foundation.
- 3:8-13** Temple's foundation is built.
  - 3:8-9 Construction of the temple begins.
  - 3:10-11 Foundation completed.
  - 3:12-13 Mixed emotions.
- 4:1-5:2** Opposition to the Jews.
  - 4:1-5 Opposition to the temple (and Jerusalem).
  - 4:6-23 Opposition to the city of Jerusalem under Nehemiah.
  - 4:24 Back to the opposition to the temple.
  - 5:1-2 Help from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.
- 5:3-6:12** Opposition from Persian governor Tattenai.
  - 5:3-5 Tattenai opposes the Jews.
  - 5:6-17 Tattenai's letter to Darius.
  - 6:1-5 Darius finds Cyrus' decree.
  - 6:6-12 Darius' letter to Tattenai.
  - 6:13 Tattenai gives wealth to the Jews.
  - 6:14 Help from the prophets.
- 6:15-22** Temple completed!
  - 6:15 The temple is completed.
  - 6:16-18 Dedication of the temple.
  - 6:19-22 First Passover at the second temple.
- 7:1-8:36** Ezra and company return to Judah.
  - 7:1-10 Overview of Ezra's arrival.
  - 7:11-20 Artaxerxes' instructions and commission to Ezra.
  - 7:21-26 Artaxerxes' instructions to provinces west of the Euphrates.
  - 7:27-28 Ezra praises God and prepares to set out.
  - 8:1-14 List of family leaders.
  - 8:15-20 Ezra enlists many Levites.
  - 8:21-23 Prayer for safe journey.
  - 8:24-30 Ezra distributes the wealth to be presented at the temple.
  - 8:31 The safe journey.
  - 8:32-36 Arrival in Jerusalem and delivery to the temple and the region.
- 9:1-10:44** The matter of marrying foreign wives.
  - 9:1-4 Ezra hears the news and humbles himself.
  - 9:5-15 Ezra's prayer of humility.
  - 10:1-6 Plan for the people's repentance: send away the foreign wives.
  - 10:7-11 The call to send away the foreign wives.
  - 10:12-15 The people ask for much time.
  - 10:16-17 The people send away their foreign wives in less than four months.
  - 10:18-44 List of men and families who had married foreign wives.

## **Book of Ezra - Suggested XXXXX-Week Schedule**

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Note: For a chronological order of the events in Ezra, see my class notes on The Jews Under Persia.

<b><u>Week</u></b>	<b><u>Scriptures</u></b>
1	Introduction/Theme, 1:1-11
2	2:1-70
3	3:1-7, 4:24-5:2
4	5:3-6:14
5	6:15-22
6	7:1-28
7	8:1-36
8	9:1-15
9	10:1-15
10	10:16-44

The theme of Ezra's book is how God restores His people ([Ezra 3:1-2](#)). "By the seventh month, the Israelites had settled in their towns, and the people gathered together in Jerusalem. Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers and the priests along with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his brothers began to build the altar of Israel's God in order to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God." God restored them from captivity to their Judean towns. Through God's command, they restored the sacrifices, the temple, and the law of Moses.

The style of Ezra's book is on the history of how the Jews returned from exile and rebuilt the temple.

The translation I mostly use is the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

#### **1:1-4 Cyrus' decree to build the temple.**

First year of Cyrus king of Persia. Cyrus the Great became king of Persia in 559 BC. However, this decree was given in 538 BC. It was in this year that Cyrus became king of Persia, Media, and Babylonia, the first year he was king over these great empires.

Jeremiah. (1) Jeremiah, among other prophets, had prophesied that the Jews would return to their land and rebuild. Specifically, Jeremiah prophesied twice that their time of captivity would be 70 years ([Jer 25:8-12, 29:1-14](#)). It was this specific prophecy that was fulfilled with Cyrus' decree. (2) About 12 years before this, Daniel read Jeremiah's prophecy for himself ([Dan 9:1-2](#)). (3) Ezra does not mention it, but this also fulfilled a specific prophecy from Isaiah. Back in the days of Hezekiah or before, more than 150 years before Cyrus, Isaiah prophesied that God would use Cyrus--God calls him by name ([Is 44:24-45:7](#))!

Lord put it into the mind. How did God do this? Certainly God could have done this by Himself. But because Isaiah had prophesied about Cyrus by name, it is extremely likely that Cyrus read the words of Isaiah for himself. In fact, Daniel was an official of Cyrus, and since Daniel was familiar with Jeremiah's prophecies, Daniel was probably familiar with Isaiah's as well. It is not far-fetched to think that Daniel showed Cyrus about all of these things!

Appointed me to build Him a house. Back to Isaiah's prophecy that Cyrus probably read for himself, [Is 44:28](#) explicitly says that Cyrus will want to rebuild the temple. It appears that Cyrus believed the prophecies about God and everything that God had done for him.

May he go to Jerusalem. Cyrus didn't command the Jews to return. He only gave them complete freedom to go by their own choice and power. As we learn later in Ezra, there is a second wave that goes under Zerubbabel while Darius is king. There is a third wave that goes under Ezra while Artaxerxes is king.

Let every survivor be assisted. Similarly to how the Jews escaped Egypt's captivity, here, Cyrus is asking that the people of Persia bless the Jews with all kinds of gifts. Unlike Egypt who gave the Jews immense wealth out of fear, Cyrus is God's servant who joyfully has his people bless the Jews.

#### **1:5-11 Jews prepare to return and are given gifts.**

Judah and Benjamin. Based on the family names in Ezra 2, only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin are returning at this time. The other ten tribes have been called the "lost ten tribes of Israel." From what is known to us, their history formally ended when they were conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC.

All whose spirit the Lord stirred. God didn't inspire everyone to go at this time. This is only the first wave. Refer to comments at [Ezra 1:3](#) for some other waves that went.

All their neighbors supported them. It appears that the Jews had a great reputation in Persia. Like Cyrus, the Persian people might have also believed in God's prophecies also, or they understood and believed that what God did to the Jews was because of their sins.

Articles of the Lord's house. From all the way back to Nebuchadnezzar, who had stolen the things of the temple, now Cyrus is giving them back. This truly is the time when God will restore His people!

Sheshbazzar. Traditionally, this person has been identified with Zerubbabel. [Ezra 5:14](#) says that Sheshbazzar was appointed by Cyrus. However, [1 Esdras](#), which explains the history of Zerubbabel before he came to Judah, says that he was under Darius, not Cyrus. Because their names are different and because [1 Esdras](#) supports that Zerubbabel was appointed by Darius, it is my belief that Sheshbazzar was the Persian governor (under Cyrus) before Zerubbabel was governor (under Darius). A possible problem with this is found in [Ezra 5:16](#) where it says that Sheshbazzar laid the foundation of the temple. But this isn't really a problem because [Ezra 5:16](#) says that he only started to build the foundation. In chapter 3, we read that Zerubbabel finished the foundation. This gets even more confusing when [Ezra 3:9-10](#) seem to imply that Zerubbabel built the foundation of the temple. Also, Haggai, written before Zerubbabel laid his foundation,

says that the foundation was already there (Hag 2:18). In short, all of this is best explained in this way: Cyrus appoints Sheshbazzar as the first Persian governor of Judah. Sheshbazzar takes the first wave of captives back to Judah and begins working on the foundation. Later, Darius appoints Zerubbabel as governor of Judah. Zerubbabel brings a second wave of captives back with him in the second year of Darius. Then with Haggai and Zechariah, he builds the altar, finishes the foundation, and finishes the temple about 4 years later. Then in Ezra 7, Ezra brings a third wave of captives. Of course, the belief that Sheshbazzar is the same person as Zerubbabel, that he was appointed by Cyrus, and that he started to build the foundation but then sat around for 17 years (until the second year of Darius)... this belief is very possible. It better explains the building of the foundation, but contradicts 1 Esdras when it doesn't have to. This commentary follows that Sheshbazzar is not the same as Zerubbabel and that Zerubbabel journeyed to Judah during Darius because the problems with this belief can be explained while the other view contradicts 1 Esdras. In other words, I believe the former belief has fewer problems. This is mostly seen in how Ezra 1 and Ezra 5 explicitly say that Sheshbazzar was under Cyrus and in all other passages uses a different name: Zerubbabel (who I believe was under Darius). If these were the same person, I believe either Ezra 1:11 or Ezra 5:14-16 would say Zerubbabel. Instead, it seems that Ezra consistently uses Sheshbazzar in connection with Cyrus and Zerubbabel in connection with Darius.

### **2:1-2a The leaders of the journey to Judah.**

[Ezra 2:1-70]. This whole chapter is nearly identical with Neh 7:6-73 and 1 Esdras 5:7-46. (1) The names are different, but this is understandable because spellings can change as well as people can go by multiple names. (2) There are differences in the number of men and with the number of gifts to the temple. In all three accounts, they give the same total: 42,360. If you sum up each one, you get: Ezra with 29,818, Nehemiah with 31,089, and Esdras with 33,922. In a way, this is acceptable because none of the accounts gives totals for all groups. For example, there are no totals for these two groups: the temple servants (Ezra 2:43-53) and those disqualified for the priesthood (Ezra 2:61-63). But as for the numbers that differ between the accounts, these must be copyist errors. We may never know which number in which account is the same as the original. To see a chart of all the totals, see my hand-out: Number Differences in Zerubbabel's Return.

Each to his own town. You have lived nearly your whole life in a foreign country. When it is time for you to return to a land that should be yours, where will you live? How about in the same towns that your ancestors lived in? The people are returning to the same place they would have been as if there was no exile. For the elderly, they are actually returning home! What a restoration!

Zerubbabel. (1) Did anything significant happen to Zerubbabel that caused him to be the leader of the people and the Persian governor of Judah (Hag 1:1)? Yes! See my hand-out for 1 Esdras 3, 4, 5:1-6. (2) According to 1 Chr 3:16-19, Zerubbabel is the great grandson of Jehoiakim, the next to last king of Judah. Most passages say that Zerubbabel's father is Shealtiel, but 1 Chr 3 says it is Pedaiah. Most likely, Shealtiel died without children so the Pedaiah would be the natural father (and legal uncle) while Shealtiel would be the legal father (and natural uncle). For a little more evidence on this, see my notes in my hand-out on 1 Esdras 5:5. (3) Zerubbabel and Shealtiel are mentioned in both Matthew's and Luke's genealogies.

Nehemiah. This cannot be the Nehemiah who wrote the book for he would still be in Persia until the reign of Artaxerxes I.

Seraiah. He is the father of Ezra. Nehemiah wrote that he was one of the priests (Neh 12:1). 1 Esdras 5:5 says he is the grandfather of Jeshua who will be the high priest. Therefore, Jeshua is Ezra's nephew.

Mordecai. This cannot be the Mordecai of Esther since that Mordecai lived 60 years later and worked for Artaxerxes I.

### **2:2b-20 Totals of all the men by family.**

#### **2:21-35 Totals of all the men by city.**

Bethlehem. It is interesting that this is the first city mentioned. Did the people already know that the Messiah would come from this town (Mic 5:2)? Regardless, this is the town that will birth Jesus, the King.

Anathoth. This is mentioned many times in the Scriptures as being a great farming town (1 Chr 6:60). It is located within the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 21:17-18). Jeremiah was from this town (Jer 1:1, 29:27). The people of this town were not favorable to Jeremiah (Jer 11:21-23). Right before Jerusalem was destroyed, Jeremiah inherited a field there and sealed up the deed because Israel would be restored to that land (Jer 32:6-15). And here they, being restored to this land! Jeremiah's deed is once again valid.

Kiriatharim, Chephirah, Beeroth. Kiriatharim should read Kiriath-jearim. These were the cities of the Gibeonites (Josh 9, specifically 16-18).

Ramah. This is located in Benjamin (Josh 18:21-25). It is the birthplace of Samuel (1Sam 1:19) and where he ruled as judge and priest (1Sam 8:4).

Geba. This town was known as a farming town in the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 21:17, 1Chr 6:60). It was a place where the Israelites (Jonathan) fought against the Philistines (1Sam 13:3).

Michmas. It should read Michmash. This was a place where Israel fought the Philistines (1Sam 13-14).

Bethel, Ai. These are truly ancient cities. Bethel, the town named by Jacob in Genesis 28:19. It was given to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 18:11-13). Ai was one of Joshua's only defeats because of Achan's sin. Ai would also be a town within Benjamin.

Lod, Hadid, Ono. Lod and Ono were built by the descendants of Benjamin (1Chr 8:12). Hadid was probably another one of "its villages."

Jericho. There could a lot said for this town. From the time of Joshua all the way to Jesus Christ, this town has always had a big significance.

## **2:36-58 Totals of all the men by duty.**

[Ezra 2:36-53]. For some of the names of these men, see 1Chr 9:10-21.

[Restoring King David's appointments]. If you trace these priests back, you find that most of the lineages go back to King David. This is another symbol of restoration. These are the same families who David put in charge of the first temple. Now they are being restored to their duties with the second temple.

Priests... Levites. Remember that all priests were Levites but not all Levites were priests. Levites were the children of Levi while priests were a subset of them: the children of Aaron.

Jedaiah. This is probably the same person as in 1Chr 4:37. If so, this lineage goes back to the time of King David. He is not the same person as in 1Chr 9:10 (contemporary to Ezra) nor 1Chr 24:7 (from Simeon).

Immer. This is probably the same person as in 1Chr 24:14. If so, this lineage goes back to the time of King David. A list of selected men from his genealogy from David to Ezra is found in 1Chr 9:12.

Pashhur. This is probably the same person as in 1Chr 9:12. If so, then the Pashhur family and the Immer family is closely related, Pashhur being a descendant of Immer.

Harim. This is probably the same person as in 1Chr 24:8. If so, this lineage goes back to the time of King David.

Kadmiel. He was probably a close kinsman to Jeshua.

Hodaviah. In Neh 7:43, he is called Hodevah.

Asaph. He is the author of 12 of the psalms and my personal favorite of the psalm writers. He was a very talented musician and cymbal player appointed by David (1Chr 15:16-17, 16:4-7) and in the Levite family of Gershon (1Chr 6:39-43), who were in charge of the outer tabernacle (not the holy items or furniture). For a list of some of the descendants of Asaph, see 1Chr 9:15.

Shallum. He appears to be a descendant of Zadok, the one who was high priest during King David (1Chr 6:12, Ezra 7:2). 1Chr 9:17 says that Shallum was the chief of the gatekeepers.

Akkub... Hagab. These two are omitted from Nehemiah's list (Neh 7:48).

Asnah. This one is omitted from Nehemiah's list (Neh 7:52).

Nephusim. In Neh 7:52 he is called Nephishesim.

Bazluth. In Neh 7:54, he is called Bazlith.

Solomon's servants. As we see that a few of these families were appointed by King David, perhaps all of them were because this section says that these were Solomon's. In other words, it seems that these were the families appointed to the temple service by Solomon.

Hassophereth. In Neh 7:57, he is called Sophereth.

Peruda. In Neh 7:57, he is called Perida.

Ami. In Neh 7:59, he is called Amon.

## **2:59-63 Totals of all the men without ancestry.**

Addan. In Neh 7:61, he is called Addon.

Unable to prove Israelite. While in captivity, or even before going into captivity, these families lost their family genealogies. Without their family history, there was no proof that they were even Jews! How sad it would be to be a true Israelite but not able to prove it! As we are about to see regarding the priests who are in the same boat (2:62), proving that you were an Israelite was a big deal. So the next time you come to a genealogy, remember that it is a big deal! Without it, one could not prove they were a real Jew or not. No wonder Matthew begins his gospel with Jesus' partial genealogy which goes back to Abraham.

Delaiah. This person is not the same as in 1Chr 3:24 because that person is the sixth generation after Zerubbabel. He is probably the same as in 1Chr 24:18, where he is in the list of priests under King David.

[Bua]. The Septuagint lists another family name here: Bua.

Tobiah. There is a Tobiah in Nehemiah chapters 2, 4, 6, and 13, but that person is an Ammonite.

Hakkoz. He is probably the same as in 1Chr 24:10. He was rank seven in the priests under King David, but now his family cannot prove they are his descendants. One of the men from this family, Meremoth, later helps Nehemiah build a couple sections of the Jerusalem wall (Neh 3:4, 3:21).

Barzillai the Gileadite. This very old man was from Gilead which was east of the Jordan in either Gad or Manasseh. He was a part of a group that helped David while his son Absalom had usurped the throne (2Sam 17:27-29). After David received back the kingdom, David blessed Barzillai for helping him (2Sam 19:31-37, 1King 2:1-7). Barzillai's son, Adriel, married Saul's daughter, Michal (Merab), and David killed their children (2Sam 21:9). Yet even with this rich history, they were still disqualified because they had lost their genealogical records.

Disqualified from the priesthood. See my notes on Ezra 2:59.

The governor. Remember that Zerubbabel is the governor (Hag 1:1).

Urim and Thummim. (1) These are mentioned in the following places: Ex 28:29-30, Lev 8:6-9, Num 27:18-21, Deut 33:8, 1Sam 28:3-7, Neh 7:65, and here. Based on the Exodus, Numbers, and 1 Samuel passages, these were items placed in the priestly breastplate that allows the priests to make divinely-decided decisions, which is called cleromancy. In the 1 Samuel passage, we see Saul using it but getting no answer. We see much of its purpose in the Numbers passage. Outside of Saul's failed attempt to use it, the Urim and Thummim are not mentioned outside of the Pentateuch. It seems that Zerubbabel is truly trying to restore things by using the divine decision-making tools that God established with Moses and Aaron. (2) The Septuagint literally translates the words in to English: Lights and Perfections.

## **2:64 Totals of all men.**

### **2:65-67 Totals of slaves, singers, and animals.**

Not including. It is clear that slaves, both male and female, the singers, and the animals were considered of lesser value than the rest. Even in this day and among God's people, slaves were considered to have less value, possibly a close value to the animals.

200 singers. In Neh 7:67, the number is 245.

### **2:68-70 The people arrive in Judah and give the gifts to the temple.**

Freewill offerings. Just like in the New Testament (2Cor 8:8, 9:7), the people are voluntarily giving a portion of their wealth for the temple. This shows that the people are not just coming back to re-inhabit the land. They also want to see God's temple restored as well. However, at this time the gifts are given but no one begins the work. God was not pleased with this, which is why Haggai comes to prophecy.

Original site. They aren't going to build the temple some place new. They wanted to build the temple on the original site, restoring not only the temple but also its exact location. If you go back to Solomon, this is Mount Moriah!

Gold coins, silver, priestly garments. Many have tried to put value on all this. See commentaries by Keil and Delitzsch, John Wesley, etc. It would be too hard to come up with a reasonable figure because we do not know how much actual gold were in their gold coins or the value of a priestly garment. Additionally, Nehemiah's account differs from Ezra's anyway. However, we do know how much silver, 5000 minas or 5500 pounds, which is valued at \$1.33 million as of 3/1/2015. In Nehemiah, 4200 minas or 4620 pounds is valued at \$1.116 million as of 3/1/2015. And this only comes to a portion of the total value.

Settled in their towns. The Levites and all the temple workers settled in their towns, wherever that might be throughout Judah and Benjamin. Likewise, everyone of Judah and Benjamin settled in their towns. Everyone has arrived. Freedom is realized. Time to settle down. The life the Jews once had is now lived again. As far as where their home is, the Jews have been restored! Let's sit back and focus on turning our houses into everything we want them to be.

### **3:1-2 Altar is built.**

Seventh month. The month of Tishrei, also in the second year of Darius. This is August or September in 521 BC. We learned from 1 Esdras 5:6 that Zerubbabel and his wave of captives began to return in the first month, Nisan. Therefore, it took 6 months for this wave of Jews to return and get settled into their homes.

Jeshua son of Jozadak. (1) This is the first mention of Jeshua as the son of Jozadak and the high priest. (2) Important note: In Ezra and Nehemiah, he is called Jeshua (probably truer to the Hebrew) while in Haggai and Zechariah, he is called Joshua. In the Septuagint, his Greek name is Iesous, which is Jesus in English. Zerubbabel. Both governor (David's kingly descendant) and high priest (Aaron's priestly descendant) are working together to rebuild God's house!

Altar. The restoration of God's house begins with the altar. Why not build the house first, so that the altar would have a nice place first? The Jews are not thinking this way. It says that they are building the altar so that

burnt offerings can begin. Not only are they wanting to restore the place of worship for God, but they don't want to waste any time before they can properly worship God! As we will see, the burnt offerings begin before they even begin on the foundation. In short, the Jews recognize that their worship to God is more important than the place where they worship.

As it is written in the law of Moses. The people aren't building the altar in a way that seemed best to them.

They aren't building an altar that might allow them to worship the best way they could. Instead, they are going to God's blueprint as opposed to man's. They went back to Ex 27:1-8. This is unlike Ahaz, king of Judah, who saw the altar of Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, and thought that the Assyrians' altar was better than God's and had it built in Jerusalem (2King 16:10-14).

### **3:3-6 Sacrifices resumed.**

Even though they feared the surrounding peoples. What is said about courage? It is not the absence of fear but the boldness to overcome the fear that is there. The Jews were well aware of the people around them. Not only had they come back and settled in an area that had been settled by others, now they were practicing a religion (Judaism) very unlike any religion around them. After all, the official religion of the Persian Empire was Zoroastrianism. As is said later in Ezra, from the days of Cyrus even until the days of Xerxes, there are neighbors of Judah who make themselves enemies of Judah. (See notes at 4:1 for more details.) The Jews are well aware of the enemies around them and the great risk they are taking by sacrificing to God. Yet they do it anyway! At this point, the people are solid in their faith and trust in God.

Festival of Booths. (1) This was celebrated in the seventh month on the fifteenth day (Lev 23:34). The Day of Atonement was on the tenth day (Lev 23:26). It doesn't say whether or not they celebrated the Day of Atonement, but they probably did because sacrifices started that very day (Ez 3:6)! (2) There is a spiritual significance to celebrating the Festival of Booths also. During this festival, God told the Jews to live in booths (tents) for seven days. Neh 8:15-16 explains that they typically built their tents on top of their house. They just got to Judah and resettled in their towns a month ago. I do not believe it is coincidence that they turn right around and live in tents (foreigners) for a week. What a reminder that this world is not their home, but they are foreigners and temporary residents on the earth (Heb 11:13-16)! This celebration probably had new meaning for them—having just experienced living as foreigners in a strange land in a real way. The spiritual significance was meaningful because though they are back at their homes in Judah, they are still foreigners and temporary residents on earth.

Offerings, offerings, offerings. They sacrificed at the beginning of each month (Num 28:11-14), on holy days, and sacrificed freewill offerings. They didn't decide to do a bare minimum. They didn't decide to do only the major holidays but also did the routine sacrifices. They also gave freewill offerings for no other reason but because of how great God is. The sacrifices are in full swing. This is a big deal because the Jews went without sacrificing anything for 70 years. God had removed their sacrifices because He had had enough of their sinfulness and idolatry. Their wickedness was so bad that God ended their sacrifices to Him. But now, the Jews are experiencing spiritual restoration with God. They know that God is once again happy with their worship to Him.

First day of the seventh month. (1) Haggai tells us that the people purposed themselves to build God's house just a week earlier (Hag 1:15)! His preaching was extremely convicting and caused them to start building God's house. (2) This chapter is far from being chronologically arranged. Ezra 3:1 tells us that less than a month before, everyone got settled in their towns. This verse tells us that the altar was completed on this day. Ezra 3:4 says they celebrated the Festival of Booths on the fifteenth day. And Ezra 3:5 says that the sacrifices continued for months afterward. (3) The foundation had not been laid. Ezra wants to remind us that sacrifices to God were considered far, far more important than the actual house of God. Jesus said a similar thing when He said that God's worshipers will not do it on Jerusalem's or Samaria's mountain. Instead, the true worshipers will worship in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24). In short, worship itself is far more important than the location of worship.

### **3:7 Preparing to lay the foundation.**

Gave food, drink, and oil to the people. The Jews weren't going to expect others to help them—even though they believed that what they were doing is a mission from God. The Jews paid the people of Sidon and Tyre for the wood for the temple. They might remember the story of David who insisted that he pay full price in order to worship God sacrificially (1Chr 21:18-26). The Jews are doing the same thing. More specifically, Solomon did the exact same thing as these Jews, buying wood from the king of Tyre (1King 5:1-11, 2Chr 2:3-16).

### **3:8-9 Construction of the temple begins.**

Second month of the second year. (1) That is, the second year they spent in Judah, in the second month, Iyar.

This is April or May in 519 BC. (2) Chronologically, a lot of other passages (such as parts of Ezra 4, 5, and 6) occur between verse 7 and 8. Refer to my Chronology of the Jews Under Persia for the details.

Began to build. (1) It has been eight months since the altar was finished. (2) In verse 8-10, I do not know what Ezra means. (A) Does he mean that they began to build the foundation eight months after they finished the altar? If so, what did they do during that time? Were they busy sacrificing? Were they making the altar and the sacrificial processes more efficient? (B) Does he mean that they began working on the foundation at this time but the foundation wasn't completed for a while still? Thus, Ezra is jumping ahead to the completion of the foundation very quickly when it took some time? (C) Whichever one is true, the complete temple isn't finished until 515, a little less than four years after. Another occurrence of "began to build" is in Ezra 5:2.

Twenty years old or more. (1) The age of 20 appeared very often in the Law of Moses. It seems to be the age when men were expected to start working and included in censuses. (2) This is also a restoration of what David put in place before his death (1Chr 23:24-32). The Levites here were probably doing the same things as they also supervised the work.

Kadmiel. Remember that he was one of Jeshua's very close relatives (Ezra 2:40).

Henadad. Nehemiah said that Henadad was a ruler in the government over a district called Keilah which was one of the cities given to Judah when they entered the Promised Land (Neh 3:18). It was also a place of wartime between the Israelites and the Philistines (1Sam 23). Both from Ezra's and Nehemiah's writings, we know they were Levites (see also Neh 10:9).

### **3:10-11 Foundation completed.**

Laid the foundation. (1) I infer from this that this is when the foundation was finished. Remember that Ezra is not arranged chronologically. Another reference to the foundation is found in Ezra 5:16. In that place, I believe Sheshbazzar did not finish the foundation but only started it--as the next verse says it is not completed. This is why I have placed Ezra 4:1-5, 4:24-6:14 (opposition to the temple) between Ezra 3:7 and 3:8 (before the foundation was finished). Again, refer to my Chronology of the Jews Under Persia for more details. (2) From the time they began working on the temple (of which the altar was quickly completed first), it took 7-8 months for them to complete the foundation.

Levites from Asaph. (1) The duty of the descendant of Asaph to lead the praise to God was not new. As Ezra's book makes so clear, the Israelites are restoring all the ancient customs, even back to David and even Moses. In this case, David was the one who first appointed Asaph the seer and his descendants to lead the praise to God (1Chr 16:4-7). (2) When they sing, "For He is good; His faithful love to Israel endures forever," this is found in Asaph's first song at the dedication of the first temple (1Chr 16:34).

Shout of praise. (1) Both the priests blowing trumpets and the Levites from Asaph did this same thing when the first temple was dedicated (after the ark and the holy things were moved from the tabernacle to the temple) (2Chr 5:11-13). The differences are, of course, Zerubbabel is merely finishing the foundation, not the full temple; Zerubbabel did not have the ark, which was lost during the captivity under Nebuchadnezzar; and God's presence like a cloud was not entering Zerubbabel's temple, when it had filled Solomon's temple. (2) This appears to be the first major celebration (other than the holy days celebrated earlier in this chapter) since they began work on the temple. Just as Haggai prophesied, their work is being blessed.

[Zerubbabel]. If Zechariah's prophecy is correct: that Zerubbabel finished laying the foundation (Zech 4:9), then this is the last point in time we ever hear about Zerubbabel. How long did he remain governor? Historian Herbert Niehr said that he was governor until 510 BC. If this is true, then Zerubbabel was still governor when the temple was completed. But it is odd that he is not mentioned again in Scripture. Apparently, Zerubbabel was a very good governor.

### **3:12-13 Mixed emotions.**

Wept loudly. (1) Ezra does not tell us why they were crying. But it was the older folks who had seen the first temple and now see the foundation for the second temple. The only conclusion is that they see that this second temple will be inferior to the first. This is implied by God in Hag 2:3. Of course, the Jews under Zerubbabel have far, far fewer resources. After all, Solomon and his indescribable riches funded the first temple. (2) For a practical application, see my commentary at Haggai 2:6-9.

Could not distinguish. At first thought, distinguishing between crying and joyful shouting ought to be easy to distinguish. But in this case they couldn't. The loudness of everyone's noise must have been so loud that when you heard the person next to you, you couldn't hear what kinds of sounds were coming out. They would have their mouth open and tears running down their face, but this appearance could be true for the criers or the joyful shouters. The noise must have been deafening.

Sound was heard far away. In case you didn't catch Ezra's obvious implications as to why the sounds could not be distinguished, the sheer loudness was incredible.

#### **4:1-5 Opposition to the temple (and Jerusalem).**

[Enemies from Cyrus to Artaxerxes]. This is a list of all the passages about the enemies of the Jews from Cyrus (Ezra 1) to Artaxerxes (Neh 13). Ezra 3:3, 4, 5, 6:1-15, Neh 2:19-20, 4, 6:1-14, and all of Esther.

Enemies. Enemies? We don't know anything about them yet. Ezra wants it to be clear from the earliest possible point that these people are enemies. Not only are they enemies to God, as we will see in analyzing the next verse, but because the Jews reject their help, they choose to become the Jews' enemies. What's more, they choose to disobey Cyrus' decree (Ezra 1:4).

Worship and sacrifice to God. (See the following note, #3.)

King Esarhaddon of Assyria. (1) Who were the people who lived in the area that Esarhaddon had populated?

This is explained in 2King 17:24-41. The cities listed in verse 24 were located in Assyria and Babylon (before Babylon itself became an empire). The Assyrians, under Sennacherib, conquered the northern kingdom's capital of Samaria in 721 BC. Esarhaddon reigned from 681-669 BC. So about 40-50 years after King Sennacherib destroyed Israel, Esarhaddon placed foreign people there. (2) But who lived in the area before the reign of Esarhaddon? As Judah continued to exist, during the reigns of Hezekiah (2Chr 30:10, 18) and Josiah (2Chr 34:9), Scriptures says that there was a remnant of Jews from Israel, specifically there were remnants from Manasseh, Ephraim, Issachar, Zebulun, and Asher. In summary, there were remnant Jews in the land, then Assyria placed foreigners from Babylon and Assyria in the land. It was the combination of these peoples who would become the Samaritans later. (3) 2King 17:24-41 also explains why these people were Judah's enemies: many of them were not Jews and their worship to God was laughable to those in Judah because these enemies were openly disobeying the first two of God's Ten Commandments. They were far from worshiping God in any true sense. Notice that they even said that God was "your God" instead of saying "our God."

King Cyrus commanded us. When the Jews read Cyrus' decree, they took it for exactly what it said: that whoever is a Jew may go to Jerusalem and build (Ezra 1:3). These enemies were not true Jews.

Made them afraid. (1) Now, the Jews already had fear of the surrounding peoples (Ezra 3:3). Sure, they had God at their side, approval from Cyrus the Great, and motivation from Haggai, but they still feared what the people around them thought. This is the first recorded run-in with the surrounding peoples. (2) I have mentioned many times that Ezra is not chronological. Because of Ezra 3:3, it is very possible that the events of Ezra 4:1-5, 4:24-6:14 may have happened before the building of the altar, but I think that is unlikely. Based on my readings of all the events, I decided to place these passages between Ezra 3:7 and 3:8, after they finished the altar and before they finished the foundation.

Bribed officials. Not only did these enemies choose to slow down the efforts of the Jews by trying to break their morale with fear, but the enemies also directly attacked them with bribes. It's one thing to break morale but they were also buying off their leaders and breaking their plans. Sometimes, being attacked through the legal system is the most hurtful.

#### **4:6-23 Opposition to the city of Jerusalem under Nehemiah.**

[Chronology]. This whole section occurs at a very different point in Jewish history. Verses 7-23 is about Artaxerxes. Therefore, it really takes place closer to the time of Nehemiah. The passage is a perfect set-up to Nehemiah 1, so I have placed it there in my chronology (between 456-453 BC).

Ahasuerus. Unlike Esther, both the Hebrew and the Greek read Ahasuerus. It is unknown which king is meant here, either Xerxes I or Artaxerxes I. If it refers to Xerxes, this one verse is all the Biblical information we have from his reign. If it refers to Artaxerxes, then it refers to the rest of this section (Ezra 4:7-23). For more information, see my notes on Esther 1:1.

Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel. (1) The history of these men has been lost. Because of Ezra 4:10, it is implied that these men were the leaders of the Persian province of Samaria. (2) The Septuagint says that Tabeel wrote to Mithredath and others, then the tribute-gatherer wrote to Artaxerxes. I believe the Hebrew is correct here.

Aramaic. (1) Aramaic was the universal (bridging) language, starting with the Assyrian Empire (910 BC), through the Babylonian Empire, and to the end Persian Empire (340 BC). Beginning with the Persian Empire (540 BC), Aramaic was the common language of province of Judah and Samaria. (2) What language was this letter translated into? Though Aramaic was the universal language, the official language of the Empire was Old Persian. Ezra has included this letter in his book. It seems most likely that he had the original Aramaic, not the version with Old Persian. I believe Ezra mentions this point about translation to say that he is including the original letter, not the translated one.

Rehum and Shimshai. The history of these men has been lost also. It appears that these two men were not the leaders of the province of Samaria. They were the chief ministers to the three leaders of Samaria. Tripolis, Persia, Erech, Babylon, Susa (Elam). These are the locations from where all the leaders of the province of Samaria have come from. All of these locations or peoples are unknown, except for Babylon and Susa. English translations have used their best guess. The only thing we do know is that these unknown locations were located in the long-gone Assyrian Empire. So they would be found in or north of Samaria. But Babylon and Susa were the capitals of the Babylonians and Persians. In short, I believe in listing these places they mean that the leaders are a mixture of local people, leaders who were placed there by Babylon, and leaders who were placed there by Persia. Lastly, Daniel tells us that Elam was the province Susa was in (Dan 8:2).

Ashurbanipal. Ashurbanipal was the last great king of Assyria. These writers lived in Samaria and long-gone Assyria. Of course they would honor Ashurbanipal because he was a HUGE part of their history. It was no secret that he was a great Assyrian king. But I wonder if the way they honored him in their letter was an easy slap in the face to the Persians. It is as if they are saying, "You rule us as a province of Persia, but we miss the days when we were ruled by great and honorable kings such as Ashurbanipal." But I could be wrong.

Rebellious city. The city was certainly rebellious against God (Zeph 3:1-5). But I don't think this is what the Samaritan leaders had in mind. They might have remembered how Jerusalem always fought against anyone who came to conquer them. They took a stand against Assyria, Egypt, and Babylon. It was Babylon that destroyed the city. But probably the greatest examples of rebellion were from people such as Absalom who rebelled against his father David and Jeroboam who rebelled against Solomon's son Rehoboam and began the Kingdom of Israel apart from the Kingdom of Judah. I suppose there were lots of examples of rebellion that the Samaritans and Artaxerxes could read about.

Revolts in it since ancient times. The Greek says, "There are refuges in the midst of it for runaway slaves from very old time."

You will not have any possession west of the Euphrates. (1) The Greek says, "You will not have peace." (2) In either case, their message is the same: if Jerusalem is completed, they will become an enemy to Persia.

Search was conducted. Artaxerxes found historical evidence that what they were saying was true. So we know that Persia had books on the history of Jerusalem. Could these have been what we know as the books of the Kings and the Chronicles? This doesn't have to be the case, but it is likely.

Order these men to stop. (1) The temple has been completed for 60 years. What could the Jews be working on during the reign of Artaxerxes? It must have been the WALL. This would also explain why Samaria wants Persia to know about it. Not only did a wall provide a city with a feeling of security, but walls were also used as military structures. (2) This provides another reason why this passage occurred not long before Nehemiah. In fact, perhaps Nehemiah knew the people of Samaria might still be a threat to his mission so he asks Artaxerxes to write letters to him that show that he has the king's approval (Neh 2:7). In other words, he wanted letters from the king to overwrite the Samaritans' letters from the king in case they still have them.

By force and power. (1) The Greek says, "with horses and an armed force." (2) These Samaritan leaders probably felt really good about tattling on Judah. Samaria's neighboring province was doing something "daddy" didn't like, so they tattled on Judah. Now, with this letter from Artaxerxes, they had the authority to send a military force to Judah in order to stop the wall from being built.

[Nehemiah]. Chronologically, Nehemiah's book follows this.

#### **4:24 Back to the opposition to the temple.**

Darius. We're back to the time of Darius I (who reigned before Xerxes who reigned before Artaxerxes). This verse is another reminder that the Jews never worked on the temple, from the time they arrived under Cyrus, all the way until the second year of Darius. Sheshbazzar apparently was discouraged very quickly. What happened in the second year of Darius? The prophecy of Haggai which first motivated the people to build! I believe Ezra 4:24-5:2 is a flashback to Hag 1 and Zechariah who previously prophesied. These few verses are just a reminder of what has already happened and a lead-in to this whole section (Ezra 5:3-6:14) about opposition to the temple.

#### **5:1-2 Help from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.**

Haggai and Zechariah. Based on the dates in their works, Haggai prophesied from August to December 520 BC, and Zechariah prophesied from October 520 BC to December 518 BC. Of course, they could have prophesied more to the Jews that weren't written down, so they might have been prophets for a longer span of time. But we do know these dates for sure.

In the name of God. Ezra wants to remind us that these were true prophets of God. When we arrange their prophecies and Ezra chronologically, we know that their God-given roles were very, very successful. A snapshot of this can be seen in Hag 1:12-15.

Zerubbabel and Jeshua. We see in Haggai's prophecy and especially in Zechariah's prophecy that Zerubbabel and Jeshua were the primary audience of these two prophets. We also see how much favor God put on them to accomplish the temple.

Helping them. We have already seen how the prophets helped the leaders by building them up and showing that God approves of them. Even if the prophets were not physical laborers in building the temple, that should not minimize how much of a help they provided. Many times, a really good cheerleader is just as helpful as a strong worker.

[Ezra 6:14]. Ezra believed that these two prophets were so important, that he summarizes these two verses again in Ezra 6:14.

### **5:3-5 Tattenai opposes the Jews.**

Tattenai. Who was this? Unfortunately, there is no secular record of this governor. Now, there is ancient evidence of a Persian governor in Babylon named Ushtani. This was found on a tablet discovered by Meissner that dates back to June 5, 502 BC. Though the period of time is be correct, Ushtani (a Persian name) is called governor of Babylon, which is east of the Euphrates River. Ezra says Tattenai (an Aramaic name) was governor west of the Euphrates.

West of the Euphrates River. The region west of the Euphrates which was controlled by the Persian Empire was large. It included what is today Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, and the northeast part of Libya. Since Tattenai is an Aramaic name (and if we assume that Ezra didn't transliterate it into Aramaic), Tattenai's province was probably located where Syria (or Lebanon) is today, which was to the north or northeast of the province of Judah.

Shetharbozenai. This must have been some high-ranking official since he is mentioned by name. We know nothing else about this person.

They also asked them. (1) We have a different rendering in different manuscripts here. The Hebrew we have today begins this verse with, "Then we told them in that manner what the names of the men were..." The Septuagint and Peshitta begins the verse with, "Then they told them, 'What are the names of the men...?'" The only difference is that the Hebrew says that the Jews shared the names of the men who were building the temple, probably Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The other manuscripts do not share whether the Jews had answers. This difference is certainly not an important matter. Neither of the manuscripts contradict anything. (2) It is implied in 5:10 that the Jews answered all of Tattenai's questions.

Wouldn't stop them. Tattenai's questions to the Jews were just questions. He may not like what the Jews are doing, but he doesn't stop them. The Jews continue to work on the temple as Tattenai waits to hear back from king Darius.

### **5:6-17 Tattenai's letter to Darius.**

House of the great God. (1a) It is interesting how Tattenai refers to God. Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the Persian Empire. It is a monotheistic religion, and their good god is called Ahura Mazda. Tattenai probably assumes that the Jews, who are also monotheistic, are building this temple to Ahura Mazda. He would find it strange to do this because it's outside of their regular practices of Zoroastrianism. Of course, his god within Zoroastrianism is very different from the God of the Jews. So Tattenai's questions and letter to Darius might be more religious in nature than being political or emotional (that is, there is no indication that Tattenai is an enemy of the Jews or hates them right here). (1b) Perhaps Cyrus was also confused about this in his decree in Ezra 1. Now, Isaiah said that Cyrus would be His servant, and Cyrus was. But Cyrus never converted to Judaism. Perhaps Cyrus believed the decree he made for the Jews was for Ahura Mazda and that Isaiah was a prophet of Ahura Mazda. Of course, analyzing Cyrus' intentions is speculation. This idea could be completely wrong; notice how Cyrus (who never became a Jew) calls God the God of heaven. Maybe Cyrus wasn't mistaken on who the God of heaven really is. (2) So here you have two peoples worshipping in different ways, following different religious texts, but because they both worship one god, there is the possibility that one might believe they are worshipping the same god. The same is true today. Have you heard people saying, "The Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims... they all worship the same god." Well, is the god of Zoroastrianism the same god also? The only way that all these religions worship the same god is if all their religious texts and their practices come from that same god. As one looks at what the Jews, the Christians, the Muslims, and the Zoroastrians believe and practice about their god, there seems to be more disagreement than agreement. Therefore, these religions worship different gods. However, something else can be said of the Jews and the Christians. For they do have the same Scriptures except that the Christians also have the New Testament. And of course, the Christians'

practices are extremely different from the Jews. But the big thing is that the Jews do not view Jesus the Messiah as God. Since Jesus being the Son of God is a necessary belief in Christianity, they still do not worship the same God. Though the Jews and the Christians both recognize the Father and what is called the Old Testament, they do not believe in the same God because Jesus Christ has divided Jew from Christian. Paul explains this well in Rom 9:31-10:21.

For your information. (1) This copy of the letter doesn't include the names. Ezra must have chosen not to record the names, unless they were names we already knew: Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Perhaps the Jews only shared Sheshbazzar's name (see 5:16). (2) Using a reference to email, Tattenai is saying about this list of names, "See the attachment."

Angered the God of heaven. (1) Tattenai calls Ahura Mazda the "great God." The Jews call Yahweh the "God of heaven." Notice the difference. (2) Why do the Jews talk about their history? Because they have learned that the God of heaven is the true God and rightly punished all of them for their sins. Everything that happened to the Jews, both their exile into captivity and their return under Cyrus--everything--happened because God willed it. This is what Zechariah had begun his prophecy saying: Zech 1:1-6. The Jews are using this as an opportunity for evangelism. They want Tattenai and his companions to understand that the God of heaven is the true and real "great God."

Sheshbazzar. (1) Saying that Sheshbazzar was appointed by Cyrus was not said in Ezra 1, but probably implied. Both say that Sheshbazzar was the governor, but know we know that it was Cyrus who appointed him. Remember that according to 1 Esdras 3-5, it implies that Zerubbabel was appointed by Darius. As my notes explain at Ezra 1:8, I do not believe Sheshbazzar was the same person as Zerubbabel. Sheshbazzar is always mentioned in connection with Cyrus and Zerubbabel is not. And Zerubbabel is always mentioned in connection with Darius and Sheshbazzar is not. (2) The Jews mention Sheshbazzar because he would have been well-known as the first governor of Judah and to whom Cyrus gave the decree.

Foundation. The Jews say that Sheshbazzar laid the foundation, BUT it still is under construction. This shows that the Jews really did slack in their devotion to God, as Haggai 1 explains. And this shows that Ezra is not chronological because the foundation is completed in 3:8-11.

Conduct a search. Up to this point, Tattenai proves himself to be a very smart and fair governor. He didn't come to the Jews in hate, but asked them questions. He listened to them and decided to investigate their claims. He sends his letter to king Darius to look into their claim. And we will see in the next chapter that Tattenai accepts the truth. He certainly was a very smart and fair governor.

### **6:1-5 Darius finds Cyrus' decree.**

Darius' order to search. I'm curious if God's purpose behind this story of Tattenai is for the sake of king Darius. We learn that Darius will conduct the search. Perhaps God caused all this to happen so that God's goodness and His fulfillment of prophecies will come to Darius' attention. God is always working on nations, being Lord over all nations. This may be God giving Darius his opportunity to learn about the Jews and learn that the God of heaven is the true and real "great God." Or, this was so that the Jews could receive more wealth, this time from Darius (see Ezra 6:8-9).

Library of Babylon. As the Jews had said in their letter, Darius had his historians search the archives in Babylon. But they didn't find it there. They found it in Ecbatana. What could this mean? One, we don't know how long the search was made or how many other cities were searched. Two, Darius and/or his historians were committed to finding this decree. Since the decree had been given about 20 years earlier, I'm sure they were confused how such a kingly decree could be misplaced. This might show how committed Darius is to learn the truth and trust the Jews' claims. Ezra might be implying how fair and thorough Darius was as king of Persia.

Ecbatana, Media. (1) The Septuagint does not have the name of the city and region. However, the Septuagint's 1 Esdras 6:23 does have them. (2) This city is located in Persia, south of Susa. (3) This city is mentioned many times in the book of Tobit. Those events occurred 160 years before.

Decree. (1) The decree that Darius found is different from the decree in Ezra 1 and 2Chr 36. There are some parts that are not recorded. Perhaps this decree was saved and preserved by the Jews, but the Persians were not too concerned about this particular document. This might be the reason why Darius found the decree in Ecbatana and not in Susa or Babylon. (2) There are some parts here that are not in Ezra's or 2Chr's decree. Where did these dimensions come from? It is not known. But we do know that these dimensions are incorrect. Solomon's temple was 90 feet (60 cubits) by 30 feet (20 cubits) and 45 feet (30 cubits) high (1King 6:2). So we know there was a Persian copyist who failed his one job. (3) Despite this decree not being accurate or complete, it was enough for Darius to see the truth and importance of what the Jews were doing--as we will see in the decree Darius will give.

### **6:6-12 Darius' letter to Tattenai.**

Stay away from that place. Darius doesn't mean that Tattenai should never visit Judah again. In the next verse, Darius is clear that Tattenai should leave the building of God's house alone. In other words, Darius is telling Tattenai not to become an enemy to the Jews.

Tattenai. It is of the smallest importance, but "Tattenai" is not found here in the Septuagint.

Royal revenues. (1) This isn't translated literally in the HCSB. A more accurate translation is the king's tributes.

In the Septuagint, it says the king's taxes, which is pretty much the same thing. (2) The amazing thing about this is, once again, the Persian Empire is directly supporting the work of God in Jerusalem. In Cyrus' decree, he allows the Persians to voluntarily give the Jews many treasures. Now, Darius is giving a kingly command that the Persian governments--in this case specifically this province west of the Euphrates--**must** assist the Jews in building the temple. Indeed, the Persian Zoroastrians are funding the Jewish temple! Interferes. Darius is clear that he commands all this to be done. Here, he lists the punishment for whomever doesn't fund the Jewish temple.

Diligently. Darius also notes how quickly this province should fund the temple. Darius expects there to be no slacking on the part of Tattenai in giving many offerings to the Jews.

[Darius' commitment]. In Darius' response to Tattenai, we see how he is completely committed to carrying out Cyrus' original decree around 20 or so years earlier. We see how Darius built even more into the Persian decrees for the Jews; now Persians were required to give things to them. We see how highly Darius refers to the God of heaven. He even mentions how it is God who causes His name to dwell in places and can overthrow any king. We also see that Darius wants the Jews to worship God and pray for the lives of himself and his children. (His son is Xerxes and grandson is Artaxerxes who is the king during the time of Nehemiah and Esther. So we see that God does bless Darius' family.) Finally, we see Darius' charge to Tattenai to be quick about it. We don't know what happened in regard to Darius' soul, but we know that God used Darius as His servant, just as God had used Cyrus.

#### **6:13 Tattenai gives wealth to the Jews.**

Diligently carried out the decree. This is the conclusion of this story. Ezra 4 began with how Judah's enemies became Judah's enemies. This story about Tattenai is here to tell us that not everything was bad for the Jews. Ezra 4:5 says that those enemies frustrated plans and bribed officials. until the reign of Darius. Perhaps this decree from Darius ended these attacks from the Jews' local enemies.

#### **6:14 Help from the prophets.**

Decrees. (1) As we will see in Nehemiah, it seems that every generation needs a reminder that the Jews are approved by God. For in those days, the Jews will face enemies again. Even though the Jews have the approval and protection from three of the most powerful Persian kings, they still must endure their enemies. (2) The same is true for us. We have received many good and gracious decrees from God through His Son Jesus. God has promised to adopt us and to protect us, but we must still endure enemies.

Jewish elders continued successfully. (1) This ends the section (Ezra 4:1-6:14) about the opposition that the Jews faced from Cyrus (Sheshbazzar), Darius (Zerubbabel), and Artaxerxes (Ezra and Nehemiah). How did this section begin? "The construction of God's house in Jerusalem had stopped and remained at a standstill until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia" (Ezra 4:24). How does this section end? "The Jewish elders continued successfully with the building under the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah son of Iddo. They finished the building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes of Persia" (Ezra 6:14). In the end, everything was a success because of God and his prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. (2) The same is true for us. In the end, everything will be a success because of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

#### **6:15 The temple is completed.**

This house. Most Bibles do not have a paragraph break between verse 14 and 15. Granted, chronologically placing Ezra 4:24-6:14 is difficult. But Ezra is certainly not arranged chronologically but topically. For example, Ezra 4:1-6:14 is all about Judah's enemies at different times under Ahasuerus (Artaxerxes) and Darius. Ezra 4:14 is the end of that section on Judah's enemies. Ezra's transition from those stories back to the temple (6:15) is a smooth transition. But chronologically, there is a HUGE break between verse 14 and 15. I believe Bible translators should have placed a paragraph break between them.

Was completed. In only one verse, there is so much meaning and purpose. Solomon had built the first, great temple. Building the second temple was the most significant event in history for the Jews after Solomon and before the Christ. Why does Ezra take this indescribably important event and share it with only one sentence? There are two reasons. One, he wasn't there. Ezra arrives in Jerusalem about 60 years later. Having grown up in Persia, he had never experienced a time when there wasn't a second temple. Two, Ezra is a true historian. Historians really only focus on facts. Ezra gives the day, month, and year of the

temple and then moves on. Next, he goes into the facts of what was sacrificed to God in celebration of the temple. Ezra has given us the facts. He doesn't include any psalms (of which some were written during this time) or songs of praise. A few times he mentions that they celebrated with joy, but other than that, it was just facts.

Third day, Adar, sixth year of Darius. The exact day would have been Adar 3rd, 515. Using a modern-day Hebrew calendar calculator, the Gregorian date was Feb 3, 515 BC. It was a Wednesday. But I could be VERY wrong about this. Adar was used as an extra month for leap years. Do we know which Adar Ezra is referring to? ([http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish\\_date\\_converter.php](http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish_date_converter.php))

### **6:16-18 Dedication of the temple.**

Offered. Compare the amount of animals sacrificed to what Solomon sacrificed for the first temple (1King 8:63, 2Chr 7:5). Solomon sacrificed about 73 times the amount of cattle and 300 times the amount of sheep.

How far have the Jews come from being the wealthiest nation around to being a distant province in the Persian Empire. Sometimes, even after repenting, the consequences of past actions can still linger.

According to the book of Moses. The Jews do not want to make the same mistake they did before. This time, they are going back to the books of Moses for their guide on everything they do with the temple. Many, many things have changed for the Jews over the course of their history, but their Scriptures remain the same. The words of God have been and should still be their standard in all things.

### **6:19-22 First Passover at the second temple.**

Passover. Adar is the last month of the year and Nisan in the first. They were able to celebrate Passover a little over one month after the completion of the temple. How wonderful!

Assyrian king. It was a common practice to give the king the title over the land he ruled as well as the lands he conquered. In this case, Darius is king of Persia, Media, Babylon, Egypt, and others. For example, Herodotus, the Greek historian, called Cyrus "the king of the Medes." No wonder many of these kings gave themselves the title "king of kings." For some reason, Ezra calls Darius the king of the Assyrians here. Perhaps it is because Darius had shown favor over the Assyrian lands (Judah and Samaria).

### **7:1-10 Overview of Ezra's arrival.**

[Ezra 7-10]. As we learn from 7:8 and onward, the events of chapters 7 through 10 took place in the seventh year of Artaxerxes' reign over a time of 11 to 13 months. Therefore, the window of time would have been from March 458 to April 457 BC. The first four months of this time was their journey from Babylon to Jerusalem which is 7:1 through 8:31.

Seraiah. (1) Ezra's genealogy lists 16 generations from him to Aaron, the first high priest. Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list. There is a more exhaustive list in 1Chr 6. (2) Seraiah was the chief priest in Jeremiah's day, soon before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem (2King 25:18-21, Jer 52:24-27).

Hilkiah. He was high priest during the good reign of Josiah (2King 22:4, 23:4).

Zadok was a priest in David's time and was made high priest in Solomon's time (1King 1:7-8, 2:35).

Babylon. Chapters 7:1 and 8:31 are all about how Ezra comes from Babylon to Judah which lasted the first four months. This is the third (and last known) wave of Jews that come from Persia. The first was during Cyrus the Great (Ezra 1) and the second was Zerubbabel's wave during Darius I (Ezra 2).

Scribe. It is clear in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah that Ezra was a priest and scribe. We see he was a priest because he wrote that he is a son of Aaron. His book's content and style is very much that of an historian. There are dates, detailed descriptions of events from chapter 7 through chapter 10, and transcripts of a lot of letters from governors and kings. This makes sense because Ezra was an eye witness in the rest of the events in his book. This makes me wonder if his title as scribe meant he was an historian. The core definition of a scribe means "one who writes." So in Ezra's case, I believe his specialization as a scribe was in transcribing history.

Ezra. In verses 1-11, Ezra is in the third person. The first verse where Ezra writes in the first person is verse 27. It seems that Ezra 1-11 was added by someone else: one of Ezra's travel companions, Nehemiah, or someone else who knew a lot about Ezra. Ezra writing in first person continues all the way through chapter 9. Chapter 10 resumes third person.

First day, first month. In the seventh year of Artaxerxes, on the first day of the first month, Ezra left Babylon to travel to Judah. Using a modern-day Hebrew calendar calculator, the Gregorian date was Mar 4, 458 BC. It was a Thursday. But I could be VERY wrong about this.

([http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish\\_date\\_converter.php](http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish_date_converter.php))

First day, fifth month. It was exactly four months later to the day that they arrived in Jerusalem. Remember that the monthly calendar of the Jews is different from ours. Using a modern-day Hebrew calendar calculator,

the Gregorian date was June 30, 458 BC. It was a Wednesday. But I could be wrong about this. ([http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish\\_date\\_converter.php](http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish_date_converter.php))

Study, obey, teach. (1) Ezra determined in his heart to study, to obey, and to teach. He made these three things his life's purpose. These three things sound like righteousness in a nutshell! What Jew in those days and what Christian in our day should not say the same thing? Really, this ought to be the anthem of every Christian! In fact, these are the exact things that Jesus gives in His Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20). Have you determined in your heart that you will study the law of the Lord, obey it, and teach it to others? Does this describe your purpose in life? If not, why is that? (2) Whenever I read these things that Ezra dedicated himself to, I think of myself. I also think about how a few years ago, I became excited about learning history (and how says *that?*) I look at Ezra's life purpose and style of writing and I see myself. Of all the people in the Old Testament, I have realized that Ezra is my role model! From the earliest age and from my earliest memories of being able to read, I remember wanting to study God's words. Not long later, I remember how I committed myself to obey God's words. I remember many times when I taught people things about God, but it wasn't until I was around 30 years old that I was allowed to teach God's words in a formal way. I read Ezra's life purpose, and I see myself. We all have different gifts that God has given us to serve him. As for me, I see Ezra's life and have realized that God has given me the same purpose in life.

### **7:11-20 Artaxerxes' instructions and commission to Ezra.**

To Ezra. Why would King Artaxerxes write this letter to Ezra? Without much evidence to the contrary, Ezra was appointed by Artaxerxes to be the sixth governor of the Persian province of Judah, called Yehud Medinata. The first governor was Sheshbazzar under Cyrus (Ezra 1) and the second was Zerubbabel under Darius I (Ezra 2-6, Haggai, Zechariah). (Scholars have given these names for the third through fifth: Elnathan, Jehoezer, and Ahzai.) Ezra 7:25-26 makes Ezra's appointment as governor very clear. These duties sound like the duties of a governor.

An expert in the law of the God of heaven. Why would Artaxerxes speak so highly of Ezra's religion and continues to do so throughout this letter despite not being Jewish? We saw that Cyrus also praised the Jewish "God of heaven." Though the official religion of the Persian Empire was Zoroastrianism, Cyrus began a long establishment of the freedom of religion, that is, religious tolerance. This religious freedom was apparent during Darius I's reign, who was a firm believer in Zoroastrianism yet also called Him the "God of heaven," and this must have continued through Xerxes I's reign into Artaxerxes I's reign. They were so committed to religious freedom, that we see that Artaxerxes decreed that there would be no temple taxes for the Jews (7:25). (This changed with the Greeks along with the Jewish leaders during Jesus' day who began taxes on nearly everything.) But we see in 7:24 that Artaxerxes did this because he was scared of the God of heaven. It appears that he feared (was frightened by) all gods. In 7:15-20, it seems that Artaxerxes is giving the Jews a lot of gifts so that their god will look favorably on him. In his mind, he may be thinking, "If I please all the gods, then certainly, one of them will bless me and/or protect me from ruin."

Go to Jerusalem. This commission is very similar to the one Cyrus gave to Sheshbazzar.

Seven counselors. Esther was a contemporary of Ezra; while Ezra makes his way to Jerusalem and begins to lead the people, Esther is in Artaxerxes' harem waiting for her one night with the king (see my commentary on Esther). These seven counselors, who would have been counselors no more than 3 years removed from Ezra, are listed by name in Esther 1:14.

According to the law of your God. This is an explicit example of religious freedom. Now, this did not mean that the Jews could reject Artaxerxes as their king. At the end of the letter (7:26), Artaxerxes reminds Ezra that the laws of the Persians must be followed also.

Use the royal treasury. With the Egyptians, they felt forced to give the Jews all kinds of wealth because they were so afraid of God (Ex 3:19). With Cyrus, he allowed the Persian people to voluntarily give wealth to the Jews (Ezra 1:1-7). Now with Artaxerxes, he basically said, "Just go into our empire's storeroom and get whatever you need."

### **7:21-26 Artaxerxes' instructions to provinces west of the Euphrates.**

West of the Euphrates. According to today's geography, this would have been the western half of Syria, southwestern part of Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, and north Libya. I do not know how many provinces would have been west of the Euphrates, but this would have been about a seventh of the Persian Empire. There may have been around 15 provinces.

Provided promptly. Not only has Artaxerxes allowed Ezra to take from the empire's treasury, but Artaxerxes is commanding that the provinces surrounding Judah also give many treasures. The temple had already been built during the reign of Darius I. Ezra's coming to Judah with all this wealth would have brought another

golden age to the Jews. I do not think it is a coincidence that we have so many writings from the time of Artaxerxes: Ezra, Esther, Nehemiah, and Malachi. This was a golden age for the Jews, all because of Ezra. Wrath will not fall. See notes at Ezra 7:12 about Artaxerxes' relationship with God.

Tax. There were to be no taxes for anything to do with the temple! Again, this is another point in Artaxerxes' commitment to religious freedom. This allowed the Jews to worship God without any distraction of the government. This may be similar to the United States' laws for non-profit organizations. But I feel that this law given to Ezra had a lot less red tape!

Appoint magistrates and judges. This sounds like the duties of a governor over a province. See notes at Ezra 7:11 about previous governors of the province of Judah.

Law of your God and law of the king. Notice that Artaxerxes said, "your God." In the Scriptures, this always means that the person speaking is not a believer in God. For example, King Saul started speaking this way when he was going off the deep end. Artaxerxes is definitely not a Jew. He doesn't believe in the God of heaven. What we see is Artaxerxes' commitment to religious freedom. See more notes at Ezra 7:12.

### **7:27-28 Ezra praises God and prepares to set out.**

Praise Yahweh. Ezra praises God for doing all this. Ezra is not prideful. He could have praised himself for his great knowledge and expertise in the Law of God, in the high position he had that allowed him to speak with King Artaxerxes himself, in the king and all his powerful officers showing favor to Ezra, or in Ezra taking whatever he wanted from the empire's treasury. There are a lot of reasons for Ezra to look at his importance. Instead, he praises God for doing all this.

I was strengthened. Look at all the amazing things that has just happened to Ezra! God caused all these amazing things to happen to him and Ezra said, "So I took courage because I was strengthened by God." I look at all this incredible favor, and think, "You took courage and were strengthened? No duh! Ezra, that is probably putting it lightly. Shouldn't you have said empowered or something more exciting?" When I read Ezra writing this, I wonder why he spoke about his good feelings so nonchalantly. I wonder if this is the nature of a scribe and historian. We know that they are so bland and boring and so focused on facts. Remember the unenthusiastic things Ezra wrote when the temple foundation was finished in Ezra 3:10-13? Remember all the facts and lack of enthusiasm when the temple was completed in Ezra 6:15-22? When Ezra, being a boring historian, wants to add something about his feelings, it seems so bland. Anyway, this is what I see in this passage.

### **8:1-14 List of family leaders.**

Genealogical records. (1) Genealogies were extremely important for the Jews. See notes at Ezra 2:62. (2) Instead of looking at this section name by name, there are a few themes happening. (2a) First, many of these men's ancestors were part of Zerubbabel's arrival during the reign of Darius I, about 60 years before. You can find a lot of their names in Ezra 2. (2b) Secondly, a lot of these families who were already in Judah have, by this time, married foreign wives. You can find a lot of their names in the second half of Ezra 10. (2c) Thirdly, many of the men who travelled with Ezra were leaders of the Jews. You can find many of their names in Nehemiah as they helped build the wall or helped Ezra and Nehemiah make laws.

### **8:15-20 Ezra enlists many Levites.**

River to Ahava. The location of this place is completely unknown. Scholars have guessed that it is Hit, Iraq which is about 114 miles east of Baghdad. For Ezra and company, Ahava was probably about 10% into their journey to Jerusalem. What we know for sure, according to Ezra 8:31, Ahava was a 12-or-less-day journey from Babylon.

No Levites. It says that Ezra searched among the priests but did not find any Levites. Technically, priests are Levites because they are the sons of Aaron, who is a son of Levi. Obviously, the implication is that Ezra is looking for Levites who can perform the other duties, such as Merarites (who were in charge of the building pieces of the tabernacle) or Kohathites (who were in charge of the furniture inside the tabernacle).

Eliezer, Jarib, Shemaiah, Nathan, Zechariah [of Bebai], Meshullam. We learn that many of these priests who were traveling with Ezra back to Jerusalem had married foreign wives (Ezra 10:18, 10:29, 10:31, 10:39, 10:26).

Teachers. The Greek version (Septuagint) does not say that Jojarib and Elnathan were teachers.

Iddo, Casiphia. In the Greek, Iddo and Casiphia do not appear in the text. Instead of Iddo, the Greek says "rulers" and then "to speak," respectively. Instead of Casiphia, the Greek says, "It reads, 'I sent them to the rulers with the money of the place, and I put words in their mouths to speak to their brethren the Nethinim with the money of the place, that they should bring us singers for the house of God.'" This rendering makes sense because Casiphia in the Hebrew means "silver-like." If the Hebrew is correct in saying that Casiphia

is the name of a town, no one knows where this town was. Since it was near Ahava, it would have been in Babylon.

Temple servants. The fact that there were temple servants at Casiphia brings a lot of questions to my mind.

Why weren't there temple servants in Babylon where the Jewish leaders were exiled to? Why were there temple servants in this obscure town a short way into their journey to Jerusalem? Why did Ezra need temple servants anyway... especially when the temple was already built in Jerusalem with Jeshua as the high priest? We know the temple servants were not priests (see Ezra 9:15), so why were they needed when the temple's building pieces and the furniture would never need to travel anywhere? In summary, weren't there already people in Jerusalem to do everything that the Jews needed?

Sherebiah, Hashabiah, Jeshaiiah. These were the men Ezra found to be Levites (non-priestly temple servants).

But, with a static temple that would not need Merarites to carry the temple pieces and furniture anymore, what would these men do? In Nehemiah's day, they either became a leader of a district in the province of Judah (Neh 3:17), they publicly read the Law to the people (Neh 8:7), lead the people in praises (Neh 9:4-5ff), or signed Nehemiah's confession document (Neh 10:11-12).

Mahli. Was a son of Merari. Being Levites, again, the Merarites were in charge of taking care of the building pieces of the tabernacle.

Appointed by David. With a close look at Ezra 2, we saw two patterns: (1) the priests were required to have proof of their genealogy in order for them to be priests in Jerusalem and (2) many of those priests were of lineages that went all the way back to David, the one who began the process of building the temple. Here, it mentions that these non-priestly Levites were able to trace their genealogy back to David.

### **8:21-23 Prayer for safe journey.**

Proclaimed a fast. Fasting and prayer are connected. How so? Fasting enhances prayer. Many righteous people in the Scriptures fasted so that their prayers would be more powerful. David fasted and prayed over his sick child (2Sam 12:16), Daniel fasted and prayed over the imminent release from exile (Dan 9:3), Esther will fast and pray before he goes to the king uninvited (Esther 4:16), and Jesus said that powerful demons could only be expelled through prayer and fasting which increase faith (Mark 9:29, Matt 17:20-21). Fasting increases a person's humility, as Ezra says here. And we know that "God gives grace to the humble" (Jam 4:6).

Safe journey. Ezra is praying for a safe journey. As he says, he is afraid to ask the king for help and I suggest that Ezra is afraid of the enemies between them and Jerusalem. Praying for a safe journey no matter where you will go is a great thing. Ezra is putting his trust and reliance in God by asking for this. However, has Ezra forgotten what Empire he is a part of? Cyrus directly blessed the Jews, then Darius directly blessed the Jews, and now Artaxerxes has directly bless the Jews even giving Ezra a letter from him. Really, Ezra has nothing to fear at all! He's on a mission from God and has the authority of the king of Persia. It does not surprise me that Ezra made it safely to Jerusalem. But I am still thankful and glad that Ezra still prayed for the safe journey. Whether there is fear or not, we do not know what is in store for us in the future. Whether we are confident like Ezra should have been or fearful like Ezra was, we should always pray for safe journeys and for all things, big and small. As Paul said literally, "Pray without omission" (1Thes 5:17). That is, leave nothing not prayed for!

Ashamed to ask the king. Why was Ezra afraid to ask the king? Would that make the God of the Jews seem weak and unable to protect them? Ezra could have asked the king for an armed escort. (For whatever reason, Nehemiah's travels from Susa to Jerusalem included an armed escort.) Ezra is afraid that if he asked the king for protection, that would show the weakness in God. Instead, Ezra puts his trust in God to protect them by praying to God. In short, Ezra's protection doesn't come from the military of the king, it comes from the power of God.

He granted our request. I believe this was written after Ezra and his company arrived in Jerusalem. Ezra is just saying that their journey was a safe one. Obviously, Ezra wrote this passage after they had arrived in Jerusalem.

### **8:24-30 Ezra distributes the wealth to be presented at the temple.**

I weighed out. Here are the measurements of the wealth that Ezra was allowed to freely take from the Persian treasury. What wealth!

You are holy, the articles are holy. Really, only the priests were holy. And this wealth is not holy because it was taken from the Persian. What Ezra is doing here is pronouncing a blessing on these 14 men and on the wealth. They are holy because they will do the work of God in Jerusalem. The wealth is holy because it will be contributed to the temple. These men and wealth are not made holy by God but both will be holy because of their godly purpose.

Until you weigh them out. What was the purpose for them to measure all this wealth? It was to see if any of the wealth would be lost on the journey. Now, I do not think that Ezra was worried that a Jew might steal some for himself. Instead, I think Ezra was worried about an enemy plundering them along the way. This is also why Ezra divided up the wealth between 12 men and told them to guard it.

### **8:31 The safe journey.**

God protected us. They had a safe journey! This is the 4-month journey summarized in one verse.

### **8:32-36 Arrival in Jerusalem and delivery to the temple and the region.**

Rested for three days. This is how much rest they need after traveling for 4 months and over 400 miles.

Nehemiah rested the same number of days when he arrived in Jerusalem as the new governor (Neh 2:11). Meremoth, son of Uriah. Meremoth would later help Nehemiah build the wall and sign his confession document (Neh 3:4, 3:21, 10:5). We don't know who Uriah is, but it could have been a priest during Isaiah's day (Is 8:2).

Jozabad, son of Jeshua. He is listed among the men who had married foreign wives (Ezra 10:23). He later become one of the Levite leaders of Jerusalem (Neh 11:16).

Everything was verified. It was probably a big relief to know that neither enemy nor Jew stole the wealth that is now being contributed to God.

Offered burnt offerings. Why did Ezra feel the need to write down the numbers of the animals that he and his company sacrificed? As mentioned before, I believe Ezra is a true historian, recording the details.

Delivered the king's edicts. (1) This region of Persia had previously been mentioned in Ezra 5:3 and 7:21. See there for more info. Again, this area included what is today Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Egypt, and the northeast part of Libya. And this may have been around 15 provinces. This would have included Tatenai's province that we read about in chapter 5. (2) Jewish servants were sent to these places with the letter that Ezra received from King Artaxerxes. I wonder what their response would have been to know that they were being forced to give more wealth to the Jewish province of Judah.

### **9:1-4 Ezra hears the news and humbles himself.**

[Ezra 9-10]. This whole passage is a difficult one. At the end, at 10:17, I fully analyze what is going on and present a possible explanation for Ezra's and people's decision.

After these things. The previous verse says that Ezra rested 3 days after their journey. How much time passed between beginning his duties as governor and being told about this problem with the foreign wives? From chapter 10, it appears that Ezra is told about this problem one day, the next day asks all of Israel to come and discuss it, then three days later, everyone comes to discuss it. When they all meet at that time, it is November 14, 458 BC (see notes at 10:9). So subtracting that number of days, the day Ezra heard about this problem was November 10, 458 BC. Since Ezra arrived at Jerusalem on June 30, rested for three days, and began his duties on July 4, this means Ezra was governor for over 4 months before this problem was brought to his attention.

Have not separated. Since the Jews are returning to their Promised Land from captivity, it's not really the Jews who need to separate from the surrounding people because the surrounding people were there before the Jews returned. What is meant by separating from the surrounding people is being separated in a spiritual sense. The Jews are tolerating, accepting, or even participating in these nations' detestable practices. God commanded the Jews to be holy and set apart from these surrounding nations.

Detestable practices. Let's take a moment and analyze what God had instructed the Jews, what these detestable practices would do to the Jews, and what God had said about marrying foreigners. (1) First, God very strongly warned the Jews not to participate in these nations' detestable practices nor allow any of the foreigners to practice them (Ex 34:15-16, Lev 18:24-30, Deut 12:29-31). (2) The whole reason God warned about foreigners was because of their religions. God knew their pagan religions would tempt the Jews, so God gave those strong warnings. Now, throughout the Law, God gave many laws concerning foreigners who lived in the Jewish nation. Sure, there were things the foreigners were not allowed to do such as eat the Passover (Ex 12:43), but throughout the Law, there were far more commands about partnership with foreigners than there were about disfellowship with foreigners. One powerful example is found in Lev 19:34, "You must regard the foreigner who lives with you as the native-born among you. You are to love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God." Thus, so far, there was no sin for a foreigner to live among and do things with the Jews. Granted, of course, God gave strong warnings about their seemingly attractive religions. (3) The passage that the Jewish leaders are bringing to Ezra's attention is probably Deut 7:1-6. These instructions bring a lot of light to the whole situation of Ezra 9-10. To read my reaction to the decision made by Ezra and the leaders, see my notes at Ezra 10:17.

Canaanites... Amorites. The Canaanites (Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites) and others were conquered by the Israelites when they first settled in the Promised Land under Joshua. We know that the nations were not wiped out by the Jews, but were more thoroughly wiped out by the Assyrians and especially the Babylonians. It is amazing that remnants of these people, at least, remnants of their religions are still around in Ezra's day. It appears that some of their cultures still linger. There is absolutely no mention of these cultures after the time of the Greeks, the empire after Persia. The Greek conquered with their culture as well as their weapons, all these nations were probably assimilated into the culture of the Greeks.

Holy seed. I believe they are mistaken about this. They are mistaking the purity that God called them to, a purity based on faith and obedience. Instead, they are looking at their physical lineage, which they are calling "seed," that is, the seed of Abraham (cf. Gen 12:7), and saying that the physical lineage is impure. Paul makes it clear in Romans that it is not the physical seed of Abraham that is holy but the spiritual seed of Abraham that is made righteous through faith (Rom 4).

Leaders and officials. Verse 1 says the leaders brought all this to Ezra's attention. Here, it says the leaders and officials have taken the lead in this problem. It seems obvious that many of the leaders has married foreign wives and have tolerated, accepted, or participated in detestable practices. A few of the leaders, who presumably have kept themselves pure, are telling Ezra about this problem. What a wide-spread and accepted problem this is!

Tear tunic and robe, pulled hair. Tearing of the clothes is common in the Old Testament. It usually accompanied holy men who were so devastated in repentance. However, as for the pulling of hair, this is not mentioned anywhere else in the Scriptures. This response from Ezra can be described as insane. After all, not only would he have the strength to pull out his own hair but also endure the pain that came with it. Ezra grew up and lived in Persia his whole life. He became an expert in the Law of Moses and probably imagined what a perfect Jewish society was supposed to be. Now that the Jews received at least two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, and the temple had been rebuilt about 57 years earlier, what more could the Jews ask for? I have a feeling that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem and expected his idea of a perfect Jewish society. Now, he is seeing that there is no perfection in humans and the province of Judah has problems that he did not expect. I believe this would best explain Ezra's response of near insanity.

Gathered around me. I don't believe people joined Ezra by just standing around him. Because these are people who tremble at the words of God, they would be joining Ezra, sitting right next to him, tearing their own clothes, and also making a statement of remorse and humiliation. When the Scriptures mention a godly man tearing his clothes, it very often mentions other godly men doing the same thing with them.

Devastated. What would all this look like? Here is Ezra, the new governor of the Persian province of Judah. A few leaders come up to him and tell him that many of the leaders have taken the lead among the people in marrying foreign wives and are tolerating, accepting, or participating in the detestable practices of the nations who lived there before the Israelites even settled in the Promised Land. Ezra, who expected nothing like this, tears his clothes, the usual response when in great remorse and repentance, and is so devastated that he also pulls out his own hair like a madman. He falls to the ground and just sits there. Many godly men also join Ezra, probably in tearing their clothes also, and sit with him until evening. They could be exposing their underwear, but they sit there in silence until evening.

### **9:5-15 Ezra's prayer of humility.**

Evening offering. In order for the altar to remain consecrated, a lamb was instructed to be sacrificed every evening (Ex 29:36-45).

Humiliation. Humiliation was exactly what this was for Ezra. The act of tearing your clothes was usually an act of repentance and of humility. And for Ezra, the governor of the province of Judah, this was extremely humiliating!

Fell on my knees. (1) Notice that Ezra spend a good portion of the day in humiliation, having his clothes torn and just sitting around. Notice that it wasn't until the evening hour that Ezra then goes from his humiliation to falling on his knees in prayer. Ezra and the godly men with him had been sitting in silence for a long time. For Ezra, a lot of that was probably the getting over the shock of learning about this incredible problem that he was not expecting. (2) Humiliation should always cause us to pray to God. And if we aren't praying to God like we should, then we should expect a humble experience to come our way.

Our iniquities. Ezra was not guilty of marrying foreign wives. Yet here, he calls this sin "our iniquity." This shows Ezra's very humble character. He is throwing his lot in with all the Jewish people who had married foreign wives. Ezra did not see this as a problem for many individuals. Instead, he saw this as a nation-wide problem. A problem this accepted by the nation would not bring favor from God to their nation. That is, if the nation as a whole brought shame to the name of God, then God would punish the whole nation, as He did to Israel with Assyria and Judah with Babylon. Ezra knows that they are all in this problem together and includes himself as being guilty.

Grace has come to preserve a remnant. Ezra knows that God was right and just in doing all those terrible things by the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians to the Jews because of their sins. He recognizes that God did not have to preserve a remnant of the people to live on. It was by God's merciful grace that He has allowed a remnant of Jews to survive and has re-given them the land of Judah and even had them rebuild the temple. Ezra recognizes that everything the Jews have now is not by their own works but it is all because of God's mercy and grace.

Rebuild the house of our God. Chronologically, this has already happened. Remember, Ezra is speaking for all the Jewish people and sees how God has led them through the past generations. He does not only consider the present time, but gives thanks to God for all that He has already done for the Jews who came before Ezra.

Commands you gave through the prophets. Ezra's words here which he says are from God and the prophets are not found in the Scriptures verbatim. But throughout the books of Moses, these things are said. Specifically, Ezra probably has in mind Lev 18:24-30. And this passage probably has the most influence on Ezra's and the Jewish community's upcoming decision about this problem.

Never seek their peace or their prosperity. Interestingly, this phrase is found outside of the context of the pagan religions of Canaan. In Deut 23:3-8, God says that an Ammonite or Moabite will never, ever enter the Lord's assembly, even to the tenth generation. However, God said that an Edomite or Egyptian can enter the Lord's assembly in their third generation. Yes, very interesting. It is about the Ammonite and Moabite that God says, "Never seek their peace or prosperity as long as you live." In Ezra's prayer, he seems to be saying this about all the nations with detestable practices. Sure, Ammonites and Moabites are listed in Ezra 9:1, but so are Egyptians, with whom God was more lenient. Perhaps Ezra is being blinded by Lev 18:24-30 and Deut 7:1-6. This would make sense because of the decision he and all the Jews are about to make. Why would God treat all these people like worthless human beings? The only reason I can think of is that these foreign wives must have been knee-deep in detestable practices. To Ezra, they must have been seen as abominable people to him. To him, these are not decent foreigners among the Jews but evil foreigners. What should Ezra and the Jews decide to do? To read my reaction to the decision made by Ezra and the leaders, see my notes at Ezra 10:17.

Intermarry. The way Ezra phrases it here, it appears that these Jewish who married foreign wives married them knowing full well that they were committing detestable practices. There really seems to be no other explanation. If this is the case, then there is certainly guilt on their heads. God was explicit that any detestable practices must be stopped within the Jewish nation. Instead of stopping them, many Jews (many of the leaders) have literally got in bed with detestable practices. Jews intentionally decided to be as intimate as one could get with people whom God strongly warned them to stay away from and to hate their ungodly religions. So yes, there is deep guilt on the Jews for sinning against God in this way!

#### **10:1-6 Plan for the people's repentance: send away the foreign wives.**

Ezra. Ever since 7:27, Ezra has been writing in first person. This marks a return to third person. It is very probable that Ezra 10 was written by someone else. It could have been a later historian. Or, I believe it is more likely that these are the official historical documents of the province.

Men, women, and children. From the earliest outset of this problem, Ezra wrote this so that we know that this family problem was addressed by families. As we will see through the rest of this chapter, the final decision was not made only by the leaders of the province. Ezra, being a just and respectable governor, includes all of Israel in the decision-making process. And here, before that process began, we see men, women, children--whole families!--gathering around Governor Ezra and weeping over this nation-wide problem.

Shecaniah son of Jehiel. (1) Shecaniah is the man who comes up with a plan. He helps Ezra get off his knees and inspires him to solve the problem and not mourn about it forever. His example is good for us today! We should mourn over our sin like Ezra has done. However, the time of mourning MUST come to an end and MUST be followed up with a time of repentance, that us, a time to focus on overcoming our sin. And so Shecaniah is a problem solver and a motivator. Good for him! (2) Do you think it was easy for Shecaniah to come up with the idea to send away the foreign wives? In Ezra 10:26, we learn that his father, Jehiel, is one of the men who has married foreign wives. Since Shecaniah is one of the men who tremble at God's commandments and is not named in the list in the second half of this chapter, I do not believe that Shecaniah is the son of a foreign wife (though his father has married a foreign wife). In short, Shecaniah has something to lose from his idea: his step-mother. Do not automatically think that Shecaniah is cold-hearted for suggesting this idea. He knows how close to home his plan will hit him.

Unfaithful to our God. Remember that according to Deut 7:1-6, the Israelites have sinned against God by marrying foreign wives. When the same thing happens again late in Nehemiah's life, Nehemiah brings up the example of Solomon when he very harshly rebukes them (Neh 13:23-27).

Send away all the foreign wives and children. The sending away of the foreign wives and their children might not be understood as divorce. (This is true both in the Hebrew and in the Greek.) The Hebrew word *shalach* means "to send away." This word is used in the Old Testament as a figure of speech for divorce. But the Hebrew word used here, *yatsa*, which means "to go out," is never used in the Old Testament as a figure of speech for divorce. Most translations do not translate this phrase correctly, saying "to send away." Instead, there are a few literal translations that translate this correctly as, "to cause [them] to go out." (2) About this passage being about divorce, however, many scholars (such as Albert Barnes) believed that "according to the Law" meant to give them a bill of divorce (Deut 7:1ff), that this was in fact divorce. One can easily make the argument that, although the word for "send away" is not used here, no matter how you look at it, the solution they decided on was to divorce their foreign wives. After all, does it make sense to cause your wife to go away from you permanently and it not be divorce? The word divorce means "to cut off." Isn't that what is happening here? So is this divorce or not? Technically, it is not divorce. Practically, it is divorce. (Also see notes on Ezra 10:11, "Separate.")

According to the Law. (1) About how this phrase could possibly refer to a bill of divorce, see the previous comment. (2) The Hebrew and Greek differ here. First, the Greek does not contain the phrase about those who tremble at the command of our God. Second, the Hebrew reads, "According to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the Law," while the Greek reads, "Alarm them with the commands of our God, and let it be done according to the Law." The Greek wording would explain verse three in how the Jews will cause the foreign wives to go away (as opposed to just being sent away). See previous comment about the difference in sending away and causing to go away.

Your responsibility. I have already noted that this was a nation-wide problem and a problem among the leaders of the people. Because of this, the Jewish government should take the lead in solving the problem. This is why it is Ezra's responsibility since he is governor.

We support you. You can see how great Shecaniah is at inspiring and motivating. He says, "Get up," "We support you," and "Be strong and take action." I don't know what person would not be encouraged by someone telling them, "I support you." To know that someone has your back, holds your hand, or lifts you up, it gives people great strength. Shecaniah is also saying, since Ezra is the governor, that whatever decision Ezra makes, whether it be to follow his idea or another solution, he will support Ezra's decision. In short, Shecaniah suggests an idea to solve this problem, encourages Ezra, and will support Ezra as governor. Shecaniah is a team player!

Took an oath. Ezra agreed with Shecaniah's idea so whole-heartedly, he made the leaders of Israel take an oath that they would pursue exactly what Shecaniah suggested. In their minds, it was exactly the right thing to do and it must be completed.

Jehohanan son of Eliashib. We learn later in 10:28 that Jehohanan is one of the men who had married foreign wives. Ezra spent the night in his house. With Ezra about to have all Israel send away their foreign wives and with Jehohanan having married a foreign wife, what did the two have talk about? Did Ezra want to consult Jehohanan, a person who would be found guilty, before making a final decision? Did Ezra want to understand from Jehohanan how hard it would be for him to send away his foreign wife? Did Ezra refuse to eat and drink anything to show his remorse both over the unfaithfulness of the people and regret over having men like Jehohanan to send away their wives?

### **10:7-11 The call to send away the foreign wives.**

All the exiles to gather at Jerusalem. Just like the men, women, and children weeping with Ezra the day before, Ezra wants all of Israel to come and help decide what to do about this problem. Ezra was not rash in doing what Shecaniah had suggested. He wanted to see if all the people were on board with this decision also. Ezra wanted to know if everyone would be willing to go through with it. Again, Ezra proves his character and respect with the people by including them in the conversation. Shepherds of God's churches, please take note!

Forfeit all his possessions and excluded from the assembly. Remember that Ezra, as governor, had the power to do these things (Ezra 7:25-26).

Benjamin and Judah. When we analyzed the roll of exiles in Ezra 2, we noticed that the only tribes who returned from captivity were from these tribes as well as from Levi. And any other names that were given in Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Esther, all the families were from one of these three tribes. This is the first time in the chronological Scriptures that the two main tribes are explicitly mentioned.

Twentieth day of the ninth month. The exact day would have been Kislev 20th, 458 BC. Using a modern-day Hebrew calendar calculator, the Gregorian date was Nov 14, 458 BC. It was a Sunday. But I could be wrong about this. ([http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish\\_date\\_converter.php](http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish_date_converter.php))

Heavy rain. (1) Twice Ezra mentions heavy rains in this chapter. When the people respond to Ezra in verse 13, they say that they would rather come back at a more convenient time because of all the rain. In many climates, especially in Mediterranean climates, early winter was known to be a rainy season. (2) Sure the rain was the reason why the people said that this matter should be resolved at a later time. Also, it is possible that the Jews may have interpreted all the rain as a sign of God's displeasure with them.

Confess and do. This is what repentance is all about. It is recognizing that sin has occurred and being remorseful over it. But that is just the first half of repentance. For repentance to be complete, a person must also do the will of God. In this case, Ezra explains what they are to do: separate themselves from their foreign wives and surrounding people. The same thing happened at Pentecost when Peter preached his first sermon. The people were cut to the heart, recognizing that they had sinned and were remorseful. Then the people asked, "Brothers, what must we do?" We see that as another great example of repentance becoming complete.

Separate yourselves. (1) Sending away the foreign wives was one of the things Ezra could do as governor (Ezra 7:25-76). (2) In the Hebrew, "separate" means what you think it means: to divide. In the Greek, it also means the same thing: to make an expanse. From my comments earlier about sending away or causing to go away and from what Ezra says here, this is a physical separation. Also from my comment earlier, although there seems to be no implication that the men were divorcing their foreign wives, but because of what is happening with this separation, sending away, or causing to go away, divorce is a valid inference.

### **10:12-15 The people ask for much time.**

All the assembly. All the people have heard Ezra's plan and they all agree with it. The idea started with Shecaniah, was adopted by Ezra, committed to with an oath by the leaders, and now agreed by all the people. Before any action was done, the Jews first got the approval of everyone. This is a great example of democracy in a province that was not structured as a democracy. Full credit should be given to Ezra in all these things. He sought the approval of everyone before carrying out his plan.

This isn't something that can be done in a day or two. The people agree to the plan, but they give their own idea on how to resolve it. They give some very good reasons why this cannot be done in the same visit that has brought them to Jerusalem. They point out that there are too many people, it is the rainy season which is not a good time to be outside all day, and they are only in Jerusalem for a short time before they have to return to their hometowns to work. Their solution is for the elders and judges of each town take the lead in having any guilty family come to Jerusalem to have this problem resolved. This is far more efficient way to send away their foreign wives.

We have rebelled terribly. They also say "in order to avert the fierce anger of our God." The people are confessing just as Ezra admonished them.

Meshullam. Meshullam was one of the chief leaders who traveled with Ezra from Babylon in Persia (Ezra 8:16). He may also have been one who had married a foreign wife (Ezra 10:29).

Opposed. (1) There are two ways to interpret verse 15. First, these four men opposed (or stood against) the decision made by the Jews. Newer translations have interpreted it this way. Second, these four men were appointed (or stood over) to carry out the decision made by the Jews. Older translations interpreted it this way. (2) The first word of the verse could be translated two ways. If these men were the opposition, the word could easily be translated as "only," showing that these men were the exception to the rest of the Jews. If these men were appointed, the word could be translated as "moreover", showing that the Jews appointed these men to carry out the decision. (3) Furthermore, what these men did could be translated two ways. What these men did is composed of two words. The verb is clear and is translated as "stood." The preposition is not clear and could be translated as either "against" or "over." If the word is "against," this shows that the four men stood against the decision. If the word is "over," this shows that the four men stood over the decision, appointed to carry it out. (4) Therefore, it is completely unclear which way we are to read this verse. Were these four men opposed to it or appointed to it? (4a) What about the context? Unfortunately, there are good arguments for each interpretation based on where this verse is mentioned in the next. (4b) What about scholarly commentaries on this verse? It appears that older commentaries agree with the older translations--that the four men were appointed--, and newer commentaries agree with the newer translations--that the four men were opposed. I only found that the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges and the Pulpit Commentary are commentaries that discuss both interpretations. (4c) What about the Greek Septuagint? Of everything out there, the Greek sheds the most light on how to read this verse. The Greek reads, "Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah were with me concerning this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them." Literally, it reads, "with me through." The preposition is "through" which is closer to "over" than "against." Also, notice that it is first person. If they were with Ezra, then they were appointed to this and did not oppose it. The Greek certainly supports the interpretation that these four men were appointed to carry out this decision. There is one problem though:

this is the only verse, even in the Greek, that uses the first person. So even in the Greek, it diverges from the third person and has the first person here instead. That is very fishy and somewhat discredits the Greek's reading.

### **10:16-17 The people send away their foreign wives in less than four months.**

Selected men who were family leaders. Throughout the Jewish history in the Scriptures, there were always elders of the people. These elders were the leaders of the people underneath the leaders we know about such as the judges, the prophets, the kings, the priests, the Sanhedrin, and etc. Here, before the people return to their towns, Ezra writes down the names of the family elders. These will be the men who will manage their towns and families to return to Jerusalem at various times for judgment regarding their foreign wives.

First day of the tenth month. The exact day would have been Tevet 1st, 458 BC. Using a modern-day Hebrew calendar calculator, the Gregorian date was Nov 24, 458 BC. It was a Wednesday. But I could be wrong about this. ([http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish\\_date\\_converter.php](http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish_date_converter.php)) (2) So it was 10 days later when Ezra began bringing the elders to Jerusalem who would bring along any men who had married foreign wives.

First day of the first month. The exact day would have been Nisan 1st, 457 BC. Using a modern-day Hebrew calendar calculator, the Gregorian date was Feb 14, 458 BC. It was a Saturday. But I could be wrong about this. ([http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish\\_date\\_converter.php](http://www.floridajewish.com/jewish_date_converter.php)) But since it says that the whole problem was resolved "by" this day and it was a Saturday, they probably finished resolving the problem the day before, Feb 13, 458 BC. In short, it took exactly 3 months minus 1 day to finish resolving this problem.

They had dealt with all the men / Analyzing Ezra's decision. (1) It is here that I would like to discuss everything regarding this whole problem with the Jews marrying foreign wives which spans Ezra 9-10. There are two major ways to interpret Ezra's and the people's decision, which I will refer to "their solution." We will discuss these along with a third view which I would like to explain in detail. But first, we must establish a few things. (1a) The book of Ezra does not explain whether their solution was righteous or not. At that time, there was no prophet nor sign from God about His approval or disapproval of their decision. The Scriptures are not explicit about this. But the text seems to imply that all of this was righteous. (1b) Even though this passage does not explicitly say that the men are divorcing their foreign wives, practically speaking, that is the only conclusion. Can these men who are putting their foreign wives and children away still be viewed as being married to their foreign wives? Practically speaking, this does not work. There appears to be a mass divorce. So this whole situation is very messy. (1c) There are no winners in these two chapters. Ezra and the people were certainly in a lose/lose situation. No one gained anything from their solution, and many people lost things, namely, close family members. The only positive thing that could be said about their solution is that the people's current and future spiritual purity was preserved. (1d) Therefore, it is not easy to interpret the meaning of this passage. This is why there are at least two very different ways to interpret it. Each person should be humble and not approach this passage already judging one way or another. This is why it is very important always to read this passage with open ears and fresh eyes.

(2) The first interpretation is that their solution was the right one. How could it be the right solution? (2a) There is the example of Solomon. We know that Solomon had married many, many foreign wives and those very wives were the cause of his downfall later in life (1King 11:1-4). When the problem of marrying foreign wives resurfaces in Nehemiah's day, Nehemiah reminded them of Solomon (Neh 13:23-27). We see that what God had warned the Jews not to do, Solomon did and it caused him to fall. God did not warn the Jews for no reason. Their solution was the right one so that the same thing that happened to Solomon and the people before the Babylonian captivity would not happen to them again. (2b) The Jews knew what they were getting into by marrying foreign wives. Ezra 9:1-2 says that the Jews married foreign women who had detestable practices. The implication seems to be that the Jews married women who were still practicing their worship to other gods. The Jews who married foreign wives like this had seriously violated Moses' Law (Deut 7:1-6). They were undoubtedly guilty. After all, what are the chances that they married foreign wives and then those wives adopted pagan worship practices? (2c) God was explicit that the Jews were not to intermarry with foreign wives. Deut 7:1-6 is very, very clear. Since the Jews had done just that, it was necessary for them to divorce their wives in order to obey God's command through Moses. This explains why they sacrificed rams as a restitution (or guilt) offering (Lev 5:14-19). This kind of sacrifice was for sins that were committed unintentionally.

(3) The second interpretation is that their solution was a mistake. How could they have made a mistake in their solution? (3a) Some have argued that Deut 7:1-6 were commands only for the Israelites as they conquered the Promised Land. This cannot be true because it is not true for the rest of the Law of Moses. That is, there is no reason to assume that Deut 7:1-6 was only for Joshua. (3b) The next prophet to appear is Malachi. He prophesied, "God hates divorce" (Mal 2:16). Could this be God's response to what Ezra had done and what Nehemiah were doing with foreign wives? Is this God's message of disapproval in their

solution? I do not believe so. Mal 2:13-16 is about the Jews divorcing the wives of their youth. God wants the Jews to remain faithful to their first wife. Nothing is prophesied about divorcing foreign wives who practiced detestable things. In short, Malachi is addressing a different sin of the Jews; it just happens to also be about marriage being done the wrong way. (3c) Their solution misinterprets Deut 7:1-6. How could they have misinterpreted this command? Look at verse 4. Moses explains why they are not to do this: "because they will turn your sons away from Me to worship other gods" (Deut 7:4). There is a reason why God gave this warning and command. What if a Jew marries a foreign woman who would never turn them away from the One True God? Is that possible? Would God allow a man to marry a foreign wife if she had converted to Judaism? After all, isn't this what Salmon did when he married a foreign wife from the city of Jericho named Rahab? Isn't this what Boaz did when he married a Moabite woman named Ruth? Yet both of these foreign wives ended up being ancestors to Jesus Christ! Did Boaz know that Moses had commanded that no descendants of a Moabite could enter into the Lord's assembly, even to the tenth generation (Deut 23:3)? Their solution is a misinterpretation of Deut 7:1-6, right? Otherwise, Salmon, Boaz, and even King David who married Maacah would have been guilty of sin and forced to divorce those wives! A better interpretation of Deut 7:1-6 is not that it was sinful to marry foreign wives but it was sinful to marry a foreign wife who might turn her husband from the True God. (3d) Their solution is opposite of what Paul instructs in the New Testament. Certainly, the better covenant of the New Testament reveals the true nature of God and His true desire for people. Paul tells believing spouses to stay married to their unbelieving spouses (1Cor 7:12-14). If Ezra and the people were under the New Testament, they would not have organized a mass divorce. Their solution also affected foreign children. The children were sent away also because they were children of wives of detestable practices. However, this is not true under the New Testament. Instead of the children being cursed by having a pagan mother, Paul said that children are made holy by the believing spouse. If Ezra and the people were under the New Testament, they would not have sent away the children also. Now, Paul, being an expert in the Scriptures like Ezra, would have known about their solution; he would have read Ezra 9-10 many times. Based on what Paul preaches in the New Testament, which is different from their solution, would Paul have understood their solution to be a mistake? This is very possible. (3e) Why didn't their solution go all the way? Their solution was to divorce their foreign wives. However, why didn't Ezra and the people do the other commands that Moses gave? Even Deut 7:2 says, "You must completely destroy them. Make no treaty with them and show them no mercy." Why didn't Ezra and the people do this? God approved of Phinehas going all the way and killing a foreign wife with her Jewish husband ([Num 25:1-9](#)). If Ezra did not fully complete the command, "You must completely destroy them," why did he fully complete the command, "Do not intermarry with them"? Their solution was inconsistent, so their solution must have been a mistake.

- (4) A third view is this. First, let's look at some interesting facts in this whole situation. (4a) The fact that the Jews married foreign wives is not in itself the problem. It was their detestable practices that they continued to do. What evidence is there for this? Take a look at how many men divorced their wives because of their solution. Scholars have noted that the number of men listed in Ezra 10:18-43 is surprisingly few. When you add all the numbers of all the exiles who came under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:64-65) and Ezra (Ezra 8:3-20 plus women and children) (not including Sheshbazzar, Nehemiah, or the number of children that were born in the province of Judah), the total is 55,000 but it can easily be more. When you add up all the men who divorced their wives in Ezra 10:18-43, you get 110. Therefore, out of 55,000 or more people in the province of Judah, 110 men had married foreign wives. That is about 0.2%! Go back and read the report given to Ezra in 9:1-2 and the call for all of Israel to come to Jerusalem to discuss this matter. Up to this point, this problem has been portrayed as huge and nation-wide. How could only 110 men be guilty!? One explanation given is that there were many, many hundreds of men who had married foreign wives. But those wives had converted to Judaism. As men would come to Jerusalem with their foreign wives, it was judged whether their wives were guilty of detestable practices. If not, then the women were allowed to remain married. Their situation would become the same as Salmon, Boaz, and David. But if a woman would not give up her detestable practices, then the men were guilty of marrying a foreign wife who worshiped pagan gods and they divorced them. In this view, there were 110 men who had married wives who would not convert to Judaism. They are the ones who allowed detestable things to be done in their home, so they divorced their wives to keep their households pure. So in this view, there was not a mass divorce, but only 110 men whose wives had not converted to Judaism and committed detestable practices. (4b) Moses' law about not marrying foreign wives was given through God and cannot be ignored. Although Paul seems to have instructed completely different things, is there a way that these two instructions under two covenants agree? I submit the following. Firstly, Moses told the Jews to not marry foreign wives; Paul told certain Christians to marry in the Lord (1Cor 7:39) which is a good principle for all Christians. When it comes to Jews and Christians marrying, Moses and Paul agree that they should marry in the Lord. But what about those who become Christians after they have married someone? Secondly, notice how a foreign wife is parallel to an

unbelieving spouse. In the Old Testament, if the foreign wife had a detestable practice and would not convert, they were to be divorced. In this way, their solution was the right one because of Deut 7:1-6. In the New Testament, if the unbelieving person would not convert and even wanted to divorce his believing spouse, they were to be divorced (1Cor 7:15). Thirdly, in the Old Testament, if the foreign wife converted, then they were to stay married. In the New Testament, if the unbelieving spouse wanted to stay together, then they were to stay married. Therefore, the situations can be seen as the same between Ezra and Paul. The Jews were guilty because they should have known Moses' law about marrying foreign wives who did detestable practices. In the same way, it is the Christian who is guilty if he or she marries an unbeliever and that unbeliever causes them to turn away from God. (4c) Why didn't Ezra have the foreign wives killed like Phinehas had done? Because Ezra knew that it wasn't foreign wives that were the problem but their detestable practices. In divorcing the foreign wives, they were the wives that would not give up their detestable practices. So Ezra and all the people are doing exactly what Moses said in Deut 7. Verse 5 says, "Instead, this is what you are to do to them: tear down their altars, smash their sacred pillars, cut down their Asherah poles, and burn up their carved images." There was no misinterpretation of Deut 7:1-6. Everything can be explained by showing that their solution was not based on the wives being foreign; it was based on their foreign wives' detestable practices. (4d) In the end, it wasn't marrying foreign wives that was sinful but being married to a wife who committed detestable practices. And there was never a mass divorce; only 110 men were affected this way. Look at the strengths of this view.... Their solution did not have to follow Phinehas' example because God told them in Deut 7:5 told them to do something else. They followed God's command not to intermarry with them because their detestable practices would pull them away from God. Why there were so few men who were found guilty of a nation-wide problem. They followed the example of Salmon, Boaz, and David by allowing the men to remain married to foreign wives who converted. They treated the foreigner well, just like the Law of Moses often commanded. They destroyed the people of the land who had not given up their pagan gods. And their application of their solution has strikingly similar parallels to Paul's instructions in the New Testament. Therefore, this third view, which is based on their solution focusing on the detestable practices and not only the foreign wives and that many foreign wives who had converted were accepted so that only few were found guilty... this third view can explain everything.

#### **10:18-44 List of men and families who had married foreign wives.**

Found to have married foreign wives. By this, it seems that as the people came to Jerusalem, the husbands and foreign wives were put on trial. As I explained in the third view in a previous comment, I do not believe all men who married foreign wives were found guilty. They were only found guilty if their wife continued in her detestable practices. As I explained, this is a good explanation why this list of those guilty is so short at 110 men. This is only .2% of all the people.

They offered a ram. I believe the implication is that each man offered a ram for their guilt, not that there was one ram for all these men.

Married foreign wives. One can compare many of these names to the names of those who returned with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2). There are also a few names of men who returned with Ezra.

Wives had given birth to children. This whole ordeal is not pleasant. As explained earlier, no one wins. Everyone has something to lose. The people are in a lose/lose situation. I believe this last verse is mentioned to remind the readers how hard this was. These women were guilty of detestable practices, so the punishment was also for their children which, according to what God had commanded (Deut 7:3), could not intermarry with the Jews in the future.