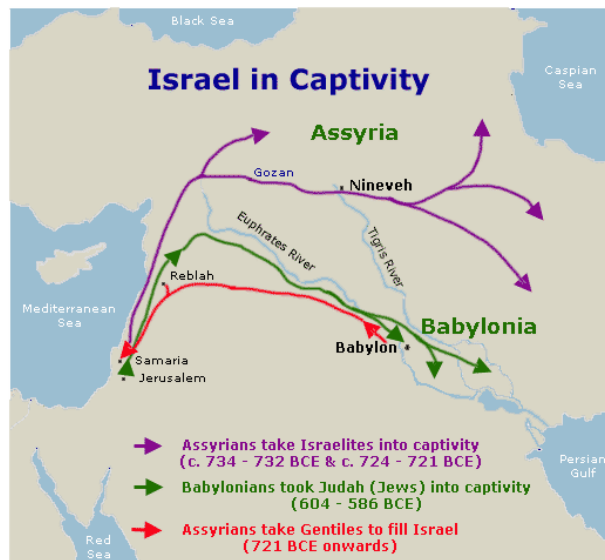


Read the Bible in A Year: Chronological

Readings for September 15-23, 2020

From: Esther 1-10; Ezra 4-10; Nehemiah 1-13; 1 Chronicles 9; Malachi 1-4; and Joel 1-3

We continue the events in Israel and Judah during this time in their history. If you recall, the people of Israel had been exiled to Assyria (see the purple lines on the map below), and the King of Assyria had repopulated the cities of Israel (Samaria) with gentiles from other lands (see red line below). Judah had been carried off to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar before Babylon had been conquered by Persia. The Persian King Cyrus had allowed a remnant of exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed in the conquest by Babylon. After opposition and after time had passed, the new King Darius of Assyria confirmed the command to rebuild the temple and reconstruction was completed, temple worship, and the celebration of the Passover resumed in Jerusalem. But most of the exiles of Israel and Judah remained in captivity and exile far from home.



Our readings begin with the story of Esther, a Jew living in exile in the Persian capital city of Susa...

Queen Vashti Deposed

Now in the days of Ahasuerus, *also called Xerxes*, who reigned over Persia from India to Ethiopia, over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, in those days, the palace where King Ahasuerus sat on the royal throne of his kingdom was in Susa. In the third year of his reign, he prepared a feast for all his officials and his servants. So, the army commanders of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the officials of the provinces were before him. He unveiled the riches of his glorious kingdom and the costly luxury of his greatness for many days, one hundred and eighty days. When these days were completed, the king prepared a seven-day feast for all the people present, from the greatest to the least, in the citadel of Susa. This feast was in the courtyard garden of the king's palace where white and blue linen hangings were fastened with cords of white and purple linen to

silver rings and columns of marble. The gold- and silver-*plated* couches were on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and *other* costly stones. They provided drinks in golden vessels (the vessels being diverse one from another) and royal wine in abundance, by the expense of the king. In accordance with the law, the drinking was not mandatory, because the king had directed all the stewards of his house to serve according to every man's pleasure.

Additionally, Vashti the queen prepared a feast for the women in the royal house of King Ahasuerus.

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Karkas, the seven eunuchs attending to the needs of King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before the king with the royal crown, to unveil her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by his eunuchs. Therefore, the king grew very angry, and his wrath burned within him.

Then the king spoke to the wise men, who understood the times (for in this way the king would speak before all who understood law and judgment). Those nearest him were Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memukan. *They were* the seven princes of Persia and Media and the king's closest confidants who met with the king and held the highest rank in the kingdom. "According to law, what should be done about Queen Vashti because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *when it was delivered* by the eunuchs?"

And Memukan answered before the king and the princes, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also all the princes and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For should this matter of the queen spread to all wives, then they would look with contempt on their husbands when it is reported that, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she never came.' This very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media, who hear of the queen's act, will say the same thing to all the king's princes. Then there will be more contempt and wrath. If it pleases the king, let a royal decree be sent by him, and let it be written in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it may not be altered, that Vashti can never enter into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and that the king will give her royal position to another woman who is better than she. When the king's decree that he shall make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is vast), then all the wives shall give honor to their husbands, both the prominent and lowly."

The suggestion pleased the king and the princes, so the king did according to the word of Memukan. He sent letters to all the king's provinces, in the script of every province and in the language of every people group, bearing the message in the languages of his people that each man should rule over his own house.

Esther Becomes Queen

After these things, as the rage of King Ahasuerus abated, he became mindful of Vashti, what she had done and what was decreed against her. So the king's servants who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king! Let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom so that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to the citadel of Susa, to the harem under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the harem, and let ointments and cosmetics be given to them. May the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." And the idea pleased the king, so he acted accordingly.

Now in the citadel of Susa, there was a certain Jew named Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. He had been taken away from Jerusalem among the exiles and carried into captivity along with King Jeconiah of Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He was the guardian of Hadassah, that is Esther (who was his uncle's daughter) because she had

neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely to look at and beautiful in form. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

When the king's notice and his decree were heard, many young women were then gathered to the citadel of Susa and *placed* under the custody of Hegai. Esther was likewise brought to the king's house and *placed* under the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the harem. Because the young lady appeared pleasing to him and had gained favor in his sight, he quickly gave her the ointments and cosmetics, her allotted food, and seven young chosen women from the king's palace. He also transferred her and her young women to the best place of the harem.

Esther had not disclosed her people or her lineage because Mordecai had charged her not to disclose it. Every day Mordecai walked around the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther fared and what might be done with her. The turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women. When the young woman went in to the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to take to the king's palace. In the evening she went in, and in the morning she returned to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. She did not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name.

When the turn came for Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what the king's eunuch Hegai, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus at his royal house in the month of Tebeth, which is the tenth month, in the seventh year of his reign.

The king loved Esther more than any other woman because she had gained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins. So he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. The king held a great feast for all his officials and servants. It was a feast for Esther. He remitted his provinces from tax payments and gave gifts according to his royal generosity.

Mordecai Uncovers a Plot

At the second gathering of the virgins, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. Esther had not yet disclosed her lineage or her people, since Mordecai had so commanded her. Esther followed the command of Mordecai just as she had when under his protection. During those days when Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, who served as keepers of the door, became angry and sought to attack King Ahasuerus. But the matter became known to Mordecai, and he reported it to Queen Esther, and Esther reported it to the king in the name of Mordecai. When the matter was investigated and confirmed, both men were hanged on the gallows, and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

Haman Plots to Destroy the Jews

After these things King Ahasuerus praised Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and promoted him, and set his seat above all the officials who were with him. All the king's servants, when they were at the king's gate, bowed or paid homage to Haman since the king had commanded it. Mordecai, however, never bowed or paid homage.

So the king's servants tending the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you transgressing the king's commandment?" Though they spoke to him daily, he never listened to them, so they reported it to Haman to see if the words of Mordecai would stand, for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed nor paid him homage, he was filled

with rage. But he disdained to lay hands on only Mordecai, since they had told him of the people of Mordecai. So Haman sought to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, cast lots) before Haman daily, and each month, until the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, *to determine the time*. Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There exists a scattered people dispersed among the *other* peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from all others, and they are not complying with the king's laws, so there may not be a suitable reason for the king to allow them to exist. If it pleases the king, may it be written that they are to be destroyed, and may there be ten thousand talents of silver deposited into the king's treasuries so that I may distribute it to the hands of those doing the work."

The king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. The king said to Haman, "The silver has been granted to you, as have the people, so do with each as it pleases you."

Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and a decree was written just as Haman had commanded to the king's satraps and to the governors over each province and to the officials of all peoples and to every province according to its own script, and to every people in their language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring. The letters were sent by mounted couriers into all the king's provinces to cause the destruction, slaughter, and annihilation of all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and even to plunder their possessions. A copy of the document, issued as law in every province, was proclaimed, calling for all people to be ready for the day.

The couriers went out, being hastened by the king's command. At the citadel of Susa, when the decree was issued, the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was in uproar.

Esther Helps the Jews

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry. He went as far as the king's gate because no one was allowed to enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. In each and every province where the king's command and his decree came there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

So the young women of Esther and her eunuchs came and told her of it. The queen was then seized by anguish. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai so that he could remove his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. So Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs appointed to attend her, and commanded him concerning Mordecai to learn what this was about and why.

So Hathak went out to where Mordecai was in the area of the city in front of the king's gate. Mordecai told him about all that had happened to him and about the sum of silver that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa concerning their destruction so he could show Esther, tell her about it, and then charge her to go to the king in order to gain him favor with the king and to make requests in the presence of the king for her people.

Hathak returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Again Esther spoke to Hathak and ordered him *to reply* to Mordecai: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that whoever, whether man or woman, wishes to come to the king at the inner court but has not been

summoned, there is one law—to put him to death—unless for some reason the king should hold out the golden scepter so that he might live. I, however, have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days.”

So all the words of Esther were told to Mordecai. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not think that in the king’s palace you will be more likely to escape than all the other Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, protection and deliverance for the Jews will be ordained from some other place, but you and your father’s house shall be destroyed. And who knows if you may have attained royal position for such a time as this?”

Then Esther replied, sending back to Mordecai: “Go, gather all the Jews who can be found in Susa, then fast for me. Stop eating and drinking for three days, night or day. I and my young women will fast likewise. Only then would I dare go to the king since it is not allowed by law, and if I perish, I perish.”

So Mordecai went away and did exactly as Esther had commanded him.

Queen Esther’s Banquet

On the third day, Esther put on her royal apparel and positioned herself in the king’s palace courtyard so that she would be directly in line with the *part of* the king’s throne room where the king sat facing the entrance of the room on his royal throne in the royal hall. When the king saw Queen Esther standing quietly out in the courtyard, she gained favor in his sight, so the king held out the golden scepter in his hand to Esther. Esther approached and touched the top of the scepter.

And the king said to her, “Queen Esther, what do you want? What is your request? Even if it is up to half of the kingdom, it will be given to you.”

Esther answered, “If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for him.”

Then the king said, “Quickly bring Haman so that we may accept the invitation of Esther.”

So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. While drinking wine the king said to Esther, “For whatever you ask, it shall be granted you. So, what is your request? Even if it is for as much as half of the kingdom, it shall be done.”

Then Esther replied and said, “This is my petition and request. If I have won the king’s favor, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do what the king says.”

Haman’s Plan to Destroy Mordecai

Haman left that day joyfully and with a glad heart, but when Haman saw Mordecai at the king’s gate, that he neither stood up nor trembled because of him, then Haman was full of indignation against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself, and when he came to his home, he sent for his friends and for his wife Zeresh.

Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, his many children, and everything about him the king had praised, and how he had promoted him over the princes and servants of the king. Then Haman continued, “Indeed, Queen Esther brought to the banquet she had prepared no one but the king and me, and tomorrow I am again invited by her with the king. Yet for all this, I am not satisfied whenever I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.”

Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends suggested to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits tall be constructed, and in the morning ask the king if Mordecai can be hanged on it. Then go merrily with the king to the banquet." And the suggestion pleased Haman, so he had the gallows constructed.

The King Honors Mordecai

During that night the king could not sleep, so he ordered that the book of memorable acts (the chronicles) be brought, and they were read before the king. It was found written that Mordecai had informed on Bigthana and Teresh, the two eunuchs of the king *servicing* as the keepers of the door, who had sought to assault King Ahasuerus.

So the king said, "What honor or dignity has been done for Mordecai as a result of this?"

Then the king's servants attending him said, "Nothing has been done for him."

So the king said, "Who is out in the courtyard?" Now Haman had just then entered from across the palace courtyard in order to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.

The king's attendants said to him, "Haman is waiting in the court."

So the king said, "Let him enter."

And Haman entered. Now the king said to him, "What should be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?"

Haman thought in his heart, "Who more than me would the king desire to honor?" So Haman answered the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, let royal apparel be brought that the king himself has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal insignia on its head. Let the apparel and horse for this man be handled by one of the king's noble officials in order to dress the man whom the king delights to honor, as well as to lead him on horseback throughout the city. Finally, let him proclaim before him, 'Like this it shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor.'"

Then the king said to Haman, "Quickly take the apparel and the horse, as you have said, and do so for Mordecai, the Jew sitting at the king's gate. Of everything you have spoken, do not fall short of any of it."

So Haman took the apparel and the horse, arrayed Mordecai, led him on horseback throughout the city, and proclaimed before him, "Like this it shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor."

As Mordecai returned again to the king's gate, Haman hurried to his house, mourning with *his* head covered. Haman recounted to his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise friends and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish lineage, then you will not be victorious over him. Rather, you will surely fall before him." While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and rushed Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

Haman Executed

So the king and Haman entered to feast and drink with Queen Esther. The king repeated to Esther what he had said on the previous day while drinking wine, "For what are you asking, Queen Esther? It shall be granted to you. Now, what is your request? Even if it is half of the kingdom, it will be done!"

Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, at my petition, let my life be given me, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to be annihilated. If only we had been sold as male and female slaves, I could have kept quiet, for that distress would not be sufficient to trouble the king."

Then King Ahasuerus answered and demanded of Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do so?"

Esther said, "This wicked Haman is the adversary and enemy!"

Then Haman was seized with terror before the king and the queen. And the king arose from the banquet of wine in his wrath and went into the palace garden. But Haman remained to plead for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king.

Now the king returned from the palace garden back to the hall of the banquet as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was.

Then the king said, "Will he also violate the queen while I am in the room?"

As the shout erupted from the king's mouth, they covered the face of Haman. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in the king's presence, said, "The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman had constructed for Mordecai (who had spoken good on behalf of the king), stands at the house of Haman." Then the king said, "Hang him on it!" So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath was pacified.

Esther Saves the Jews

On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Mordecai came before the king because Esther disclosed who he was to her. The king took off his signet ring, which he had taken away from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman.

Then Esther spoke again to the king and fell down at his feet and begged him with tears to avert the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme that he had devised against the Jews. When the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, she rose and stood before the king, and said, "If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the idea seems right before the king, and I have his approval, then let it be written to reverse the letters, devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. For how am I able to watch the evil that will unfold against my people? How can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?"

Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "See, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he threatened violence against the Jews. Now, as it suits you, write in the king's name on behalf of the Jews and seal it with the king's signet ring, because a document written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring cannot be repealed."

The king's scribes were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and everything was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, to the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their script and language. He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed it with the king's signet ring, sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding steeds bred from mares from the royal stables.

What the king granted to the Jews in each and every city was *the right* to assemble and to defend their lives by annihilating, slaying, and destroying any army of any people or any province that would assault them, the little children and women included, and to plunder their possessions. *This would happen* on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, namely, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (which is the month Adar). A copy of the edict being issued as law in each and every province was published to all people, so that the Jews could be ready for this day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

So the couriers riding on royal steeds went out with haste and urgency by the king's edict. The decree was given at the citadel of Susa.

Mordecai went out from the king's presence in royal apparel of blue and white, with a large crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple. The city of Susa erupted with shouts of rejoicing. To the Jews belonged light, gladness, joy, and honor. In each and every province as well as in each and every city, wherever the king's edict and his decree reached, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast, and a holiday. Furthermore, many of the people of the land professed to be Jews because the dread of the Jews fell on them.

The Jews Destroy Their Enemies

Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day, when the king's edict and his decree were to be carried out on the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to have power over them, things were turned around. The Jews gained power over those who hated them. The Jews had assembled in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus in order to forcibly assault those seeking their injury. No man could stand before them because the dread of them had fallen on all people. All the rulers of the provinces, and the satraps, and the governors, and all those doing the work of the king were helping the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them. For Mordecai had become great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces because Mordecai grew more powerful.

So the Jews struck all their enemies by sword, slaughtering and destroying them, and doing to those who hated them as they pleased. In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men, along with Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha. These were the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, whom they killed, but on their plunder none *of the Jews* attempted to take it.

On that day the number of those who were killed in the citadel of Susa was reported before the king. The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in the citadel of Susa and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It shall be granted you! What is your request further? It shall be done!"

Then Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews in Susa to do again tomorrow according to this day's decree. Let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows."

So the king commanded that it be so done, and the decree was given at Susa, and they hanged the ten sons of Haman. The Jews in Susa assembled again on the fourteenth day of the month Adar and killed three hundred more there, but on the plunder no one attempted to take it.

But the rest of the Jews in the king's provinces assembled to defend their lives. Some had rest from their enemies, while others killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them, but no one took from the plunder. Because *this occurred* on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, they rested on the fourteenth day and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing.

The Feast of Purim Established

Because the Jews in Susa had assembled on the thirteenth day and the fourteenth day of Adar, then on the fifteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing. Therefore, the Jews of the rural areas, who were living in the villages, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of rejoicing and feasting and a special day for sending portions *of food* to one another.

Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, in order to institute for them the celebration for the fourteenth day and the fifteenth day of the month of Adar, each and every year, like the days when the Jews had rest from their enemies, and *like* the month when things turned around for them—*changing* from sorrow to joy and from mourning into a favorable day—so that they could celebrate a season of feasting and rejoicing and sending *food* portions to one another and gifts to the poor.

So the Jews accepted what had begun *as tradition* as Mordecai had written to them. Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, cast lots), to crush and destroy them. But when Esther came before the king, he ordered by letter that the wicked plot which Haman had devised against the Jews should come upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. Therefore, they call these days Purim on the basis of the name Pur. Furthermore, based on all the information of this letter, along with what they had seen in this regard and what had happened to them, the Jews instituted and accepted *as tradition* for themselves, for their descendants, and for all joining with them not to fail in observing the celebration of these two days as prescribed and as specified in each and every year. These days should be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, province, and city, so that these days of Purim will not lose their significance among the Jews, and the commemoration of these days will not cease among their descendants.

Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter about Purim. He sent the letters to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with instructions for peace and truth in order to confirm these days of Purim at their appointed times, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had instituted for themselves and for their offspring, with the instructions for their times of fasting and their lamenting. The command of Esther confirmed these traditions of Purim, and it was written in the book.

Mordecai's Greatness

Then King Ahasuerus charged a tribute on the land and on the coastal lands of the sea. All the deeds of his power and of his might, and the detailed record of the greatness of Mordecai, after the king promoted him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? Indeed, Mordecai the Jew was second in power to King Ahasuerus. He was great among the Jews and popular with many of his countrymen, for he sought favor for his people, and spoke of peace and prosperity for all of his posterity.

After Ahasuerus died, the next king of Persia was Artaxerxes. During his reign, men from a neighboring nation sent a letter to the king complaining about the rebuilding process that was taking place in Jerusalem. This is recorded by the prophet, Ezra.

The Letter to Artaxerxes

In the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia, and the writing of the letter was written in Aramaic, and interpreted in Aramaic. Rehum the commander and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this manner:

(Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their colleagues, the judges, the officials, the officers, the Persians, the men of Uruk, and of Babylon, and of Susa—that is, the Elamites—and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Ashurbanipal deported and settled in the city of Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River—and now this is the copy of the letter that they sent to him)—

To Artaxerxes the king: Your servants the men of the province Beyond the River, and so forth. May it be known to the king, that the Jews who came from you have come near to us at Jerusalem and that they are building the rebellious and evil city, restoring its walls, and repairing the foundations. Be it known now to the king, that, if this city is rebuilt and the walls set up again, then they will not pay toll, tribute, and custom, and the revenue of the kings will be impacted. Now because we are under obligation to the king's palace, and it was not appropriate for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore we have sent and notified the king, so that a search may be made in the book of the records of your fathers. There you will find in the book of the records and realize that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful to kings and provinces, and that they have incited revolt within it in former times—for which cause this city was destroyed. We notify the king that if this city is rebuilt and the walls repaired by this means the portion Beyond the River will no longer be yours.

The king sent an answer:

To Rehum the commander, to Shimshai the scribe, to the rest of their companions that dwell in Samaria, and to the remainder Beyond the River:

Peace, and so forth. The letter which you sent to us has been translated and read before me. I commanded, and a search has been made, and it is found that this city has in the past made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and revolt have occurred there. There have also been mighty kings over Jerusalem, who have ruled over the whole province Beyond the River, and toll, tribute, and custom was paid to them. Command these men to cease now, so that this city is not built unless I give the command. Take heed now that you do not fail to do this. Why should damage increase to the hurt of the king?"

Now when the copy of the letter by King Artaxerxes was read before Rehum, and Shimshai the scribe, and their companions, they went up in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews and made them cease by force and power.

The Arrival of Ezra

Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiyah, the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the high priest- this Ezra went up from Babylon. He was

a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses, given by the LORD God of Israel. Because the hand of the LORD his God was upon him, the king granted him all his requests. Some of the children of Israel, along with some of the priests, and the Levites, the singers, the porters, and the temple servants, went up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes.

Ezra arrived at Jerusalem in the fifth month, during the king's seventh year. From the first day of the first month when the journey from Babylon began, until the first day of the fifth month when he arrived at Jerusalem, the good hand of his God was upon him. Because Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, he was doing *so* and teaching the statutes and judgments in Israel.

The Letter of Artaxerxes to Ezra

Now this is the copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, who was likewise the scribe, the one responsible for the words of the commandments of the LORD and His statutes to Israel:

Artaxerxes, king of kings, To Ezra the priest, scribe of the law of the God of heaven: Perfect peace, and so forth. I have issued a decree that all the people of Israel, and their priests, and the Levites in my realm, who are inclined to go up to Jerusalem, may go with you. For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem in accordance with the Law of your God which is in your hand, and to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, along with all the silver and gold that you can find in all the province of Babylon, plus the freewill offering of the people and priests, who are voluntarily giving for the house of their God in Jerusalem. Diligently use this money to buy bulls, rams, lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem.

Whatever seems good to you and your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do that according to the will of your God. The vessels also that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver before the God of Jerusalem. And whatever else is needed for the house of your God and is your responsibility to provide, use the king's treasury to pay for it.

I, even I Artaxerxes the king, issue a decree to all the treasurers of the province Beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, scribe of the law of the God of heaven, should request from you, you should do it with all diligence— as much as a hundred talents of silver, a hundred measures of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a hundred baths of oil, and salt (without prescribing how much). Whatever is decreed by the God of heaven, let it be zealously done for the house of the God of heaven so as to avoid there being wrath against the realm of the king and his sons. Also we are informing you that with regard to all the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, temple servants, or other servants of this house of God, it is not permitted to impose toll, tribute, or custom on them.

You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God who empowers you, appoint magistrates and judges to judge all the people of the province Beyond the River, all those who know the laws of your God and those who do not, whom you must teach. Whoever will not observe the law of your God or the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily on him, whether that be death, banishment, confiscation of goods, or imprisonment.

Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, and has extended mercy to me before the king, his counselors, and all the king's mighty princes. Thus I had been strengthened, because the hand of the LORD my God was upon me. As a result, I gathered together some of the chief men of Israel to go up with me.

So, Ezra, at the command of Artaxerxes returned to Jerusalem to oversee the worship of the Lord in the temple and to begin setting up a governmental system among the returned exiles. Any families that desired to go with him were given permission to do so...

Family Leaders Returning With Ezra

Now these are the chiefs of the households of the fathers and the genealogical register of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of King Artaxerxes: of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom; of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel, of the sons of David, Hattush, a descendant of Shekaniah and a descendant of Parosh, Zechariah, plus another one hundred and fifty men registered in the genealogical register; of the sons of Pahath-Moab; Eliehoenai a descendant of Zerariah, plus two hundred other males; of the sons of Zattu, Shekaniah a descendant of Jahaziel, plus three hundred other males; of the sons of Adin, Ebed a descendant of Jonathan, plus fifty other males; of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah a descendant of Athaliah, plus seventy other males; of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah a descendant of Michael, plus eighty other males; of the sons of Joab, Obadiah a descendant of Jehiel, plus two hundred and eighteen other males; of the sons of Bani, Shelomith a descendant of Josiphiah, plus one hundred and sixty other males; of the sons of Bebai, his son Zechariah, plus twenty-eight other males; of the sons of Azgad, Johanan a descendant of Hakkatan, plus one hundred and ten other males; of the last sons of Adonikam, the ones named Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, plus sixty other males; also of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zakkur, plus seventy other males.

Temple Servants

I gathered them together at the river that runs to Ahava, and we camped in tents three days. As I examined the people and the priests, I discovered that none of the sons of Levi were there. So I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, chief men; and also for Joiarib and Elnathan, discerning men. I gave them orders for Iddo, chief at the place Kasiphia, and crafted exactly what they would say to Iddo, his brothers, and the temple servants at the place Kasiphia so that they would bring us ministering servants for the house of our God. Because the good hand of our God was upon us, indeed they brought us a man of understanding descended from the sons of Mahli, who is a descendant of Levi, the son of Israel—Sherebiah along with his sons and his brothers, eighteen men; and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty men; and of the temple servants whom David and the leaders had appointed for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty temple servants, all of them designated by name.

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him a good route for us, our little ones, and all our substance. For I was ashamed to ask the king for an escort of foot and horse soldiers to help us against the enemy on the way, because we had spoken to the king, saying, "The hand of our God is upon all who seek Him for good, but His power and His wrath are against all who forsake Him." So we fasted and sought our God for this, and He was moved by our prayers.

Temple Gifts

Then I separated twelve of the presiding priests—Sherebiah and Hashabiah, along with ten of their brothers— and weighed out to them the silver, the gold, the vessels, as well as the contribution collected for the house of our God by the king, his counselors, his lords, in conjunction with what all Israel had offered. I weighed out into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, silver articles *worth* one hundred talents, one hundred talents of gold, twenty gold bowls *worth* a thousand darics,^[1] and two vessels of fine shining bronze, precious as gold.

I said to them, “You are holy to the LORD. The vessels are holy also. The silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD God of your fathers. Watch and guard them until you weigh them before the presiding priests and Levites, and the presiding elders of Israel at Jerusalem, for the chambers of the house of the LORD.” So the priests and the Levites accepted the weighed-out silver and gold, along with the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God.

The Return to Jerusalem

Then we began the journey from the Ahava River on the twelfth day of the first month to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the attacker and the ambusher along the way. When we arrived at Jerusalem, we stayed there three days. Then on the fourth day the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed out in the house of our God by the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest. With him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas as well as Jozabad the son of Jeshua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui—both Levites. All of it was counted by number and by weight, and all the information was recorded at that time.

Then, the children of the exile who had come out of captivity offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel. On behalf of all Israel, they offered twelve bulls, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and twelve male goats as a sin offering. All of it was offered as a burnt offering to the LORD. Finally, they delivered the king’s decrees to the satraps of the king as well as to the governors of the province Beyond the River. Accordingly, they supported the people and the house of God.

Ezra Prays About Intermarriage

Now when these things were done, the leaders contacted me, saying, “The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the people of the lands. They practice the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. Specifically, they have taken some of their daughters as *wives* for themselves, as well as for their sons, so that the holy seed has been mingled with the people of the lands. In fact, the involvement of the leaders and rulers has been foremost in this vile behavior.”

When I heard this, I tore my clothes and my robe, plucked out the hair of my head and from my beard, and sat down astonished. Because of the vile behavior of those who had been in exile, every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered to me, but I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. At the evening sacrifice I rose up from my heaviness and, despite having my clothes and my robe torn, I knelt on my knees and stretched out my hands in prayer to the LORD my God and said:

“O my God, I am ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to You, my God, because our iniquities have expanded over our heads and our wrongdoing has grown up to the heavens. Since the days of our fathers until this day, we have been in a great guilt. It is because of our iniquities that we, our kings, and our priests have been delivered—by the sword, by captivity, by spoil, and by being shamed—into the hand of the kings of the lands. This day is like that, too. Yet now for a little while, there has been a favorable response from the LORD our God—leaving us a remnant to escape, giving us a tent peg from His holy place, having our eyes enlightened by our God, and giving us a little reviving in our bondage. For though we were slaves, our God has not forsaken us in our bondage but has extended mercy to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, granting us a reviving for the rebuilding of the house of our God, for the repairing of its ruins, and for giving us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem.

Now, O our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments, which You commanded by Your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land you are going to possess, it is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands. By their abominations, it is has been filled from one end to another with their uncleanness. Now, therefore, cease giving your daughters as wives to their sons, do not take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, that you might grow strong and eat the good of the land and leave it as an eternal inheritance to your children.’

After all that has come upon us because of our evil deeds and our great guilt, seeing that You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve and have given us such deliverance as this, should we again break Your commandments and intermarry with the people of these abominations? Would You not become so completely angry with us that there would be no remnant nor any who escape? O LORD God of Israel, You are righteous, for we who escaped exile yet remain to this very day. Here we stand before You in our guiltiness even though we should not stand before You because of this.”

The People's Confession of Sin

Now while Ezra prayed and confessed, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large congregation of men, women, and children gathered around him from Israel, for the people too wept bitterly. Shekariah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered and said to Ezra, “We have acted with vile unfaithfulness against our God and have wedded foreign women from the people of the land, yet there is now hope in Israel concerning this. Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to sever relations with all the women and their children according to the counsel of my lord and those who tremble at the commandment of our God. May this be done in accordance with the law. Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. But we are standing with you. Be courageous and act!”

Then Ezra stood and made the presiding Levitical priests and all Israel to swear an oath to act according to this word. And they swore an oath. Then Ezra stood in front of the house of God and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib. When he arrived there, he ate no bread and drank no water because he was mourning over the vile unfaithfulness of the exiles.

They made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the children of the exile to assemble in Jerusalem. Whoever would not come within three days would forfeit all his possessions, according to the counsel of the leaders and the elders, and would himself be excluded from the congregation of the exiles. Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together to Jerusalem within the three days. It was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month. All the people sat on the grounds of the house of God, trembling about this matter and also because of the great rain. Ezra the priest stood up and said to them,

“You have acted unfaithfully by bringing home foreign women, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do what pleases Him: Sever your relationships with the people of the land, especially from the foreign women.”

Then all the congregation answered loudly, “As you have said to us, that we will do. But there are many people, and because it is the rainy season we will not be able to set up outside. Moreover, this is not a task for a day or two since we have so grievously transgressed in this matter. Let now our rulers preside over all the congregation so that, in each of our cities, all who have married foreign women, along with the elders and judges of that city, will come at appointed times, until the fierce wrath of our God for this matter is turned from us.” Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah opposed this, with Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite supporting them.

Then the descendants of the captivity did so. Ezra the priest selected men, heads of the fathers’ households, according to their families, each of them by name. They sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter, and finished *dealing with* every man who had married foreign women by the first day of the first month.

Those Guilty of Intermarriage

Some of the sons of the priests were discovered to have wedded foreign women, namely the sons of Joshua the son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. They committed to sever their relations with their women, and, being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their guilt. Likewise, of the sons of Immer, there were Hanani and Zebadiah. Of the sons of Harim, there were Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah. Of the sons of Pashhur, there were Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah. Also, from the Levites, there were Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah, (the same is Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. Among the singers, there was Eliashib, and from the porters, there were Shallum, Telem, and Uri. Further from Israel, of the sons of Parosh there were Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah, and Benaiah. Of the sons of Elam, there were Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah. Of the sons of Zattu, there were Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza. Of the sons of Bebai, there were Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. Of the sons of Bani, there were Meshullam, Malluk, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth. Of the sons of Pahath-Moab, there were Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh. Of the sons of Harim, there were Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malluk, and Shemariah. Of the sons of Hashum, there were Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. Of the sons of Bani, there were Maadai, Amram, Uel, Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu. Of the sons of Binnui, there were Shimei, Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, Maknadebai, Shashai, Sharai, Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. Of the sons of Nebo, there were Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.

All these married foreign women, and some of them had wives that had children.

Another important figure in this period of time in which the exiles were returning in waves and the rebuilding of the temple and walls of Jerusalem was in process was Nehemiah, the cup-bearer of Artaxerxes, an exile (as recorded in the Book of Nehemiah)...

The Prayer of Nehemiah

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hakaliah. In the month Kislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the palace, Hanani, one of my relatives, and some men of Judah arrived. So I asked them concerning the returning Jews who had been in captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. They said to me, "The remnant that returned from captivity is there in the province enduring great affliction and reproach. Also, the wall of Jerusalem remains broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days. Then I fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven, and said:

"I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and mercy for those who love Him and keep His commandments. Let Your ear now be attentive, and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant, which I now pray before You, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not obeyed the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which You commanded Your servant Moses. Please remember the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you behave unfaithfully, then I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and bring them back to the place where I have chosen to establish My name.' Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I implore You, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name. And let Your servant prosper this day and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

For I was the king's cupbearer.

Nehemiah Sent to Jerusalem

In the month of Nisan, during the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. Never had I been upset in his presence. So the king said to me, "Why is your face troubled though you do not seem sick? This is nothing but a troubled heart." Then I became very much afraid and said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should not my face be troubled when the city, the place of my fathers' tombs, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" So the king said to me, "What are you requesting about this matter?" Immediately, I prayed to the God of heaven and then said to the king, "If this pleases the king and if this might be good for your servant who is before you, then would you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs so that I may rebuild it?"

The king, with the queen sitting beside him, said to me, "How long would your journey be? And when will you return?" Because it pleased the king to send me, I established a timetable for him. I further said to the king, "If this pleases the king, may letters be given to me for the governors of the province Beyond the River so that they would allow me to pass through until I come to Judah, as well as a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the temple mount, for the city wall, and for the house into which I will enter." The king granted me these things, because the good hand of my God was upon me. When I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River, I gave them the king's letters. He also sent with me commanders of foot and horse soldiers. When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite subordinate heard this, it deeply grieved them that there was a man coming to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem's Walls

When I arrived in Jerusalem, I was there three days. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men who were with me; I told no one what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me, except the one on which I rode. So I went out by night by the Valley Gate toward the Dragon's Well and then to the Dung Gate, because I was inspecting the broken-down walls of Jerusalem and its burned gates. Next I passed by the Fountain Gate and then to the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. By going up along the riverbed at night, I inspected the wall. Then I turned back so that I could enter by the Valley Gate, and then came back again. The officials did not know where I went or what I did, since I had not yet told it to the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, or to any of the others who would do the work.

Finally, I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem is devastated and its gates are burned with fire. Come, and let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no more be a reproach." Then I told them that the hand of my God had been good to me and also about the king's words that he had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build!" So they strengthened their hands for the good work.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite subordinate, and Geshem the Arabian heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" Then answered I them and said to them, "The God of heaven, He will enable us to prosper. Therefore, we His servants will arise and build, but you will have no portion, or right, or memorial in Jerusalem."

Rebuilding the Wall

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the Sheep Gate. They sanctified it and erected its doors. From the Tower of the Hundred to the Tower of Hananel, they sanctified the wall. Next to him the men of Jericho built, and next to them Zakkur the son of Imri built.

The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate, constructing its beams, erecting its doors, and *installing* locks and bars for it. Next to them Meremoth the son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz made repairs. Next to him, Meshullam the son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel made repairs. Next to him Zadok the son of Baana made repairs. Next to them the Tekoites made repairs, but their noblemen would not put their shoulders to the work of their Lord.

Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the Old Gate. They constructed its beams, erected its doors, and *installed* locks and bars for it. Next to them repairs were made by Melatiah the Gibeonite and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, places under the authority of the governor of the province Beyond the River. Next to them Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs. Next to him Hananiah, the son of one of the apothecaries, made repairs, and they repaired Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. Next to him Rephaiah the son of Hur, commander of half of the Jerusalem district, made repairs. Next to him Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs across from his house. Next to him Hattush the son of Hashabneiah made repairs. Malkijah the son of Harim and Hasshub the son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section, as well as the Tower of the Furnaces. Next to them Shallum the son of Hallohesh, commander of the other half of the Jerusalem district, made repairs along with his daughters.

Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it, erected its doors, and *installed* locks and bars for it, plus *repaired* one thousand cubits along on the wall to the Dung Gate.

But the Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah the son of Rekab, commander of the Beth Hakkerem district. He rebuilt it, and erected its doors, and *installed* the locks and bars for it.

Moreover, Shallun the son of Kol-Hozeh, commander of the Mizpah district, made repairs to the Fountain Gate. He rebuilt it, covered it, erected its doors, and *installed* the locks and bars for it. *He also repaired* the wall of the pool of Shelah by the king's garden as far as the steps going down from the City of David. After him Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, commander of half of the Beth Zur district, made repairs as far as the area across from the Tomb of David plus to the constructed pool and to the house of the mighty.

After him the Levites, under Rehum the son of Bani, made repairs. Next to them Hashabiah, commander of half of the Keilah district, made repairs in his area. After him their brothers, under Binnui the son of Henadad, commander of the other half of the Keilah district, made repairs. Next to them Ezer the son of Jeshua, commander of Mizpah, made repairs to another section across from the ascent to the armory at the corner. After him Baruch the son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the corner to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. After him Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz repaired another section from the door of the house of Eliashib to the end of it.

After him the priests, the men of the surrounding plain, made repairs. After them Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs across from their house. After them Azariah the son of Maaseiah the son of Ananiah made repairs beside his house. After him Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another section from the house of Azariah as far as the corner plus the corner tower. Palal the son of Uzai *made repairs* across from the corner and to the tower protruding out of the king's upper house next to the courtyard of the guards. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh *made repairs*. The temple servants living in Ophel *made repairs* from opposite the Water Gate eastward to the protruding tower. After them the Tekoites repaired another section across from the great protruding tower as far as the wall of Ophel.

Up to the Horse Gate the priests made repairs—each one across from his house. After them Zadok the son of Immer repaired across from his house. After him Shemaiah the son of Shekemiah, who was keeper of the East Gate, made repairs. After him Hananiah the son of Shelemiah and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph repaired another section. After them Meshullam the son of Berekiah made repairs across from his chamber. After him Malkijah the goldsmith's son made repairs as far as the house of the temple servants and the merchants. This was across from the Mustering Gate *extending* as far as the upper room of the corner tower. Between the upper room of the corner tower and the Sheep Gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.

Opposition to the Rebuilding

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly irritated, and he mocked the Jews. He spoke before his relatives and the army of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they fortifying themselves? Will they make sacrifices? Can they complete this in a day? Can they revive the burned-up stones out of the rubbish heaps?"

Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Even what they are rebuilding, if even a fox climbed it, that would break down their stone wall."

Hear, O our God, that we are despised. Turn their reproach back upon their own head, and give them as spoil in a land of captivity: No longer cover their iniquity nor blot out their sin, which is before You since they have made insults against the builders.

So we rebuilt the wall until all of it was solidified up to half its height. The people had a passion for the work. When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabians, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard how the restoration of Jerusalem's walls was progressing and how the breaches had begun to be sealed, it made them extremely furious. So they all conspired together to fight against Jerusalem in order to

cause it chaos. Nevertheless we prayed to our God, and, because of them, we set up a watch for them day and night.

Judah had said, "The strength of the burden bearers is failing though there is much rubble. And we ourselves are unable to rebuild the wall." Our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see until we have entered in among them and slain them. Indeed, we will stop the work!" When the Jews living near them came, they told us ten times, "From every place where you turn, *they will be against us.*"

Therefore I set *guards* at the lowest positions *along the wall* and just inside the wall at the unrepaired areas. I also stationed the people by families *providing them individually* their own swords, spears, and bows. After I looked around, I stood up and said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, "Stop being terrified because of them! Remember instead that the Lord is great and awesome. So fight for each other—and for your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses."

Now when our enemies heard that this had become known to us and that God had brought their counsel to nothing, then we all returned to the wall, everyone to his work.

After that day, half of my servants did the work while the other half handled the spears, shields, bows, and body armor. Commanders were *appointed* to support every house of Judah. Those rebuilding the wall and those hauling the loads were working with one hand doing the task, but with the other hand holding the weapon. For the builders, everyone had his sword bound to his side, even while rebuilding. The trumpet blower worked beside me.

I said to the nobles, the rulers, and to the rest of the people, "The work is vast and over a large area. Since we are spread along the wall far from each other, assemble to us there at the place where you hear the trumpet sounded. Our God shall fight for us."

So we labored in the work with half of them holding spears from sunrise to the rising of the stars. Likewise at the same time I said to the people, "Every man and his servant must lodge within Jerusalem. By night, they may be a guard to us; by day, a *laborer for the work.*" So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes. Each carried his weapon, *even when washing.*

Nehemiah Stops Oppression

5 Now there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their fellow Jews. **2** Some were saying, "We and our sons and our daughters are many. Therefore, let us acquire grain so that we may eat and live."

3 Others were saying, "We have mortgaged our fields, vineyards, and houses so that we might acquire grain because of hunger."

4 Still others were saying, "We have borrowed money for the king's tribute *against the value of our fields and vineyards.* **5** Now our flesh is the same as the flesh of our countrymen. Our children are like their children, but we are subjugating our sons and our daughters as servants. Indeed, some of our daughters are in bondage already, and we are powerless *to do anything* because our fields and vineyards belong to others."

6 I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. **7** So I contemplated about this for myself and, as a result, I rebuked the nobles and officials and said to them, "Based on the claim of each against his brother, you are exacting usury." Then I convened a great assembly against them, **8** and I said to them, "By whatever means we had, we purchased our Jewish countrymen who were being sold to the nations. So, will you once more sell your countrymen so that they might *again* be sold to us?" Then they kept silent, because they found nothing to answer.

9 Also I said, "What you are doing is not good! Should not you walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? **10** Moreover, I, my relatives, and my servants are loaning

them money and grain. So, I urge you, cease from this practice of usury. ¹¹ Please restore to them, even this day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, along with a hundredth part of the money, the grain, the wine, and the oil that you had exacted from them."

¹² Then they said, "We will restore *it* and will require nothing of them. We will do what you have said."

Then I called the priests and made them swear an oath to keep this promise. ¹³ Also I shook out the front of my garment and said, "Like this, may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not carry out this promise. Exactly like this, may he be shaken out and emptied."

And all the congregation said, "Amen," and praised the LORD. And the people did according to this promise.

Nehemiah's Generosity

Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah (from the twentieth year even until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes) twelve years *had passed*. And my companions and I had not eaten the governor's food *allotment*. The former governors preceding me had extracted a heavy burden on the people, because they took from them food and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Moreover, even their servants domineered over the people. But I myself never did so, because of the fear of God. Furthermore, I stayed determined in the work on this wall. We bought no field, and all my servants were gathered there for the sake of the work.

Moreover there were *regularly* at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. Daily there were one ox and six choice sheep prepared for me. Fowls were also prepared for me. Once in ten days all sorts of wine *were supplied* in abundance. Yet for all this, I never required the governor's food *allotment* because it was a heavy burden on this people.

Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

Nehemiah's Enemies

When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and that there was not a gap in it (though at that time I had not erected the doors on the gates), Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, that we might meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono."

But they planned to do evil to me. So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so I am not able to come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and come down to you?" Four more times they sent for me like this, but I answered them the same way.

Sanballat sent the same request a fifth time by his servant, but the letter was open in his hand. In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem confirms it, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; consequently you are rebuilding the wall. According to these words, you are their king. You have also appointed prophets to preach on your behalf in Jerusalem, saying, 'There is a king in Judah!' According to these words, it will now be reported to the king. So come now and let us consult together."

I sent him *this response*, saying, "Nothing like these reports that you are saying has occurred. From your own mind, you are inventing *them*." Because they all wanted to frighten us, they thought, "They will pull their hands back from the work." But that would never be done.

So now, O God, strengthen my hands.

When I came to the house of Shemaiah the crippled son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabel, he said, "Let us meet together at the house of God, inside the temple, and then we can shut the temple doors. They

are coming to kill you! Even tonight, they could come to kill you!" But I said, "Should a man like me flee? Who is there like me who would go into the temple to save his life? I would never go!" Then I perceived and saw that God had not sent him, but that he pronounced the prophecy against me, because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He was hired for this reason: that I might become fearful, act accordingly, and sin. Then they would have an evil report by which they could reproach me.

Remember, O my God, concerning Tobiah and Sanballat these deeds of theirs, as well as the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me.

The Wall Completed

The wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard *it* and all the surrounding nations saw *it*, they were tremendously humbled. They perceived that, because of our God, this work had been accomplished.

Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah produced numerous letters in transit to Tobiah. Likewise, the letters of Tobiah came to them, because so many in Judah were bound by oath to him since he was the son-in-law of Shekariah the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berekiah. Also they reported his good deeds in front of me and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to frighten me.

Once the wall was rebuilt and I had erected the doors, the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites were appointed. Over Jerusalem, I put in charge both my brother Hanani and Hananiah, the palace commander, because each was a faithful man and feared God more than many. I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem should not be opened until the sun is hot. Until *guards* are posted, the doors should be closed and bolted. Likewise, appoint guards from Jerusalem's inhabitants—each at his post, across from his own house."

Now the city was large and spacious, yet the people in it were few since there had been no houses built.

The List of Returned Exiles

So my God put *an idea* in my mind, and I gathered the nobles, the officials, and the people together to conduct a genealogy registration. When I found the book of the genealogical register, it *contained the list* of those who first came back. I found written in it:

These are the people of the province who returned from the captivity of the exiles whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had carried away, but came back to Jerusalem and to Judah, everyone to his city. Those who came with Zerubbabel were Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

The number of the men of the people of Israel was this: The sons of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two; the sons of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two; the sons of Arah, six hundred and fifty-two; the sons of Pahath-Moab, of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and eighteen; the sons of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; the sons of Zattu, eight hundred and forty-five; the sons of Zakkai, seven hundred and sixty; the sons of Binnui, six hundred and forty-eight; the sons of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-eight; the sons of Azgad, two thousand three hundred and twenty-two; the sons of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-seven; the sons of Bigvai, two thousand and sixty-seven; the sons of Adin, six hundred and fifty-five; the sons of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety-eight; the sons of Hashum, three hundred and twenty-eight; the sons of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-four; the sons of Hariph, one hundred and twelve; the sons of Gibeon, ninety-five.

The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, one hundred and eighty-eight; the men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight; the men of Beth Azmaveth, forty-two; the men of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three; the men of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one; the men of Mikmash, one hundred and twenty-two; the men of Bethel and Ai, one hundred and twenty-three; the men of the other Nebo, fifty-two; the sons of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four; the sons of Harim, three hundred and twenty; the sons of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five; the sons of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-one; the sons of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty.

Priestly Leaders

The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three; the sons of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two; the sons of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven; the sons of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.

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

The singers: the sons of Asaph, one hundred and forty-eight.

The gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, the sons of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-eight.

The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth, the sons of Keros, the sons of Sia, the sons of Padon, the sons of Lebana, the sons of Hagaba, the sons of Shalmi, the sons of Hanan, the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah, the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam, the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephusim, the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur, the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha, the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Temah, the sons of Neziah, the sons of Hatipha.

The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Perida, the sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel, the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pokereth-Hazzebaim, the sons of Amon.

All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were three hundred and ninety-two.

These were they who came up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer, but they could not show their fathers' houses nor their lineage—whether they were of Israel:

The sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, six hundred and forty-two.

Of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who married one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name.

These sought for their fathers' registration in the genealogical registry, but it was not found. Therefore, they were considered as unclean *and removed* from the priesthood. The magistrate said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things until there was an appointed priest with Urim and Thummim.

The whole congregation together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty,

besides their male and female servants, which numbered seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven; and they had two hundred and forty-five male and female singers. Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six; their mules, two hundred and forty-five; their camels, four hundred and thirty-five; the donkeys, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

Some of the chiefs of the fathers' households gave to the work. The magistrate gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priests' garments. Others of the chiefs of the fathers' households gave to the treasury for the work twenty thousand gold drachmas and two thousand two hundred silver minas. What the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand gold drachmas, two thousand silver minas, and sixty-seven priests' garments.

So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel lived in their cities.

Ezra Reads the Law

When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.

All the people gathered together as one man in the area in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.

On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Law before the congregation of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. In the area in front of the Water Gate, he read aloud from sunrise until midday to the men, women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

Ezra the scribe stood on a raised wood platform, which they had made for the purpose. Beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiyah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people (because he was above all the people), and, as he opened it, all the people stood up. When Ezra blessed the LORD as the great God, all the people responded "Amen, Amen!" By lifting up their hands as they bowed their heads, they worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Then Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, explained the Law to the people while the people stood in their place. They read from the book, from the Law of God, with interpretation, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Then Nehemiah the magistrate, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were teaching the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Stop mourning and weeping." (This was because all the people wept when they heard the words of the Law.)

Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat, drink the sweet *drink*, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Hush! Because today is holy you should stop being so sorrowful." Then all the people went to eat, to drink, to send portions, and to enjoy a great celebration because they had understood the words declared to them.

The Feast of Tabernacles

On the second day, the chiefs of the fathers' households of all the people, the priests, and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe in order to understand the words of the Law. They found written in the Law where the LORD had commanded by Moses that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month, and that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, "Go out to the hills and bring olive branches, along with wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, and other leafy branches to make booths, as it was written."

So the people went out and brought back *branches* and made themselves booths. Each *household did* so on its roof, in their yard, on the grounds of the house of God, in the area in front of the Water Gate, or in the area at the Gate of Ephraim. All the congregation who had returned from captivity made booths and lived in them. Not since the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day had the children of Israel done so, and there was a tremendously great feast.

And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly as required.

The Israelites Confess Their Sins

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting and sackcloth, and there was dirt on them. The offspring of Israel separated themselves from all the foreigners and then stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. They stood in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day. And for another fourth, they confessed and worshipped the LORD their God. Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Kenani stood up on the stairs of the Levites and cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God. Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said:

"Stand up and bless the LORD your God forever and ever! Let them bless Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the LORD. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and You preserve them all. And the host of heaven worships You. You are the LORD God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans. You gave him the name Abraham and found his heart faithful before You. And You made a covenant with him to give him the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, and the Girgashites—to give it to his seed. Indeed, You have fulfilled Your words because You are righteous.

When You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry by the Red Sea, You enacted signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his servants, and against all the people of his land because You knew how arrogantly they had acted against them. Thus, You made a name for Yourself, as it is this day. You divided the sea before them, so they might pass through the midst of the sea on dry ground, and cast their pursuers into the deep like a stone into stormy waters. By day You led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to light the way for them to go. You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them just requirements, true laws, good statutes and commandments. You also revealed to them Your Holy Sabbath and, by the hand of Moses Your servant, set in place for them the precepts, statutes, and laws. You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water out of the rock for them for their thirst. You told them to enter in order to possess the land which You had sworn to give them. But they and our fathers acted proudly and hardened their necks and did not obey Your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of Your wonders that You performed among them. But they hardened their necks and in their rebellion appointed a leader to return to their bondage. But You are a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in kindness, and did not forsake them.

Even when they had made themselves a molded calf and said, 'This is your god that brought you out of Egypt,' and committed terrible provocations, yet You in Your great mercy did not forsake them in the wilderness: The pillar of the cloud did not depart from them by day, to lead them in the way, nor the pillar of fire by night, to light for them the way they should go. You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them, did not withhold Your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years You sustained them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing—their clothing did not wear out nor did their feet swell. You gave them kingdoms and nations, and You divided them as boundaries. They possessed the land of Sihon, which was the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og, the king of Bashan. Their descendants You increased like the stars of heaven, and You brought them into the land, which You had promised to their fathers that they would enter and possess it. So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and You subdued for them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands—with their kings and the peoples of the land—to do with them as they would. They captured unassailable cities and a fertile land. They possessed houses full of all goods, wells dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance, so they ate, were filled, and became fat, and they indulged themselves in Your great goodness.

Nevertheless they became disobedient, and rebelled against You, and cast Your law behind their backs, and killed Your prophets who had warned them to turn back to You. But they committed terrible provocations. Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their enemies, who afflicted them. When they cried to You in the time of their affliction, You heard from heaven, and, according to Your abundant mercy, You gave them deliverers who delivered them out of the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they again did evil before You. Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to You, You heard from heaven, and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies.

You warned them in order to restore them again to Your law, but they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments. They sinned against Your ordinances (which would enable a man to live, if he would do them), stubbornly turning away and becoming belligerent so that they would not hear. For many years You endured them and warned them by Your Spirit in Your prophets, yet they would not listen. Therefore, You gave them into the hand of the people of the lands. Nevertheless, for the sake of Your abundant mercy, You did not completely destroy them or forsake them. Indeed, You are a gracious and merciful God.

Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and mercy, let not all the hardship, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day, that has come on us, our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and on all Your people seem insignificant to You. You are righteous for everything that has come upon us! You have acted faithfully while we have done wickedly. For our kings, princes, priests, and fathers have failed to keep Your law and did not obey Your commandments and Your warnings even when You confronted them. For whether in their kingdom or in Your abundant goodness (that You gave them) or in the spacious and fertile land (that You set before them), they have neither served You nor turned away from their wicked deeds.

Here we are, slaves today. The land that You gave to our fathers was for eating its fruit and its goodness. Behold, we have become slaves on account of it, because its abundant produce belongs to the kings whom You have set over us due to our sins. They have control over our bodies and over our livestock, as they please. We are in great distress."

Signatories to the Agreement

So on the basis of all this, we are executing a written agreement that is being sealed by our princes, Levites, and priests.

Signatories of the Covenant

Now *the names of* those on the sealed agreement were: Nehemiah, the magistrate, the son of Hakaliah, and Zedekiah. Next were Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluk, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah.

These were the priests. The Levites were: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, and Kadmiel, along with their relatives Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Mika, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zakkur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

The leaders of the people were: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, Malluk, Harim, and Baanah.

Summary of the Covenant

The remainder of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all those who on the basis of the Law of God separated themselves from the people of the lands—their wives, their sons, and their daughters, *that is, every one capable of knowledge and understanding*—have decisively joined in with their countrymen and their nobles, and obligated themselves—by both a curse and an oath—to walk in the Law of God, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD who is our Lord, along with His judgments and His statutes so that we will not give our daughters to the people of the land nor take their daughters for our sons.

If the people of the land bring merchandise or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or a holy day. We will also renounce the seventh-year *harvest* and the full payment of every debt.

We also establish for ourselves the ordinance to collect from ourselves annually one-third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, the continual grain offering, the continual burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the New Moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, as well as for all the work of the house of our God.

Also, we cast lots to determine *the duty* of the supply of wood that the priests, the Levites, and the people—according to the houses of our fathers, *being* set by annually appointed times—might bring to the house of our God, in order to burn *it* on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the Law; and, likewise, for the annual bringing of the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all fruit of all trees to the house of the LORD; and for bringing to the priests who are ministering at the house of God, the firstborn of our sons and livestock, as it is written in the Law, plus the firstborn of our herds and flocks.

Moreover, the first of our fresh dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, and the new wine and oil we will bring to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, but the tithe of our crops we *will bring* to the Levites, since they themselves receive the tithes in all our agricultural cities. There must be a priest, a descendant of Aaron, with the Levites when they are collecting tithes, and the Levites will offer a tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, for the chambers of the storehouse. Both the children of Israel and the Levites should bring the contribution of the grain, new wine, and the fresh oil to the chambers because the vessels of the sanctuary and the ministering priests, the gatekeepers, and the singers are there.

We resolve not to forsake the house of our God.

The Residents of Jerusalem

Now the rulers of the people lived at Jerusalem, so the rest of the people cast lots in order to bring one out of ten to stay in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the other nine *remained* in *other* cities. The people blessed all the men who volunteered to dwell in Jerusalem.

Now these are the leaders of the provinces who lived in Jerusalem (though in the cities of Judah every one lived on his own property within their cities): Israel, the priests, the Levites, the temple servants, and the descendants of Solomon's servants. Some of the sons of Judah and Benjamin lived in Jerusalem.

Those from Judah were: Athaiah the son of Uziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel—the descendants of Perez, and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Kol-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of Shelah. All the descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were four hundred and sixty-eight valiant men.

These are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiiah, and after him Gabbai and Sallai, *totaling* nine hundred and twenty-eight. Joel, the son of Zikri, was their overseer, and Judah the son of Hassenuah was second *to him* over the city.

Of the priests there were: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib and Jakin; Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, was a ruler of the house of God. Their relatives performing the work of the house were eight hundred and twenty-two. There was also Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malkijah, plus his relatives who were chiefs of the fathers' houses were two hundred and forty-two; and Amashsai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, and their brothers, mighty men of valor, were one hundred and twenty-eight. Their overseer was Zabdiel, the son of Hagedolim.

From the Levites there were: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; plus Shabbethai and Jozabad, who as leaders of the Levites had oversight of the outside work of the house of God. Mattaniah the son of Mika, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, was the first to begin the thanksgiving at prayer, Bakbukiah was the second out of his relatives, and then Abda the son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun. All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred and eighty-four.

Moreover, the gatekeepers, Akkub, Talmon, and their relatives who kept watch at the gates, were one hundred and seventy-two. The rest of Israel, the priests, and the Levites were in all the cities of Judah, every one *tending* to his own inheritance. But the temple servants lived in Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were over them.

The overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mika. Some of the sons of Asaph were the singers attending to the work of the house of God, for the king's regulation about them made their unity a daily issue.

Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the sons of Zerah the son of Judah, was the king's assistant in all matters concerning the people.

The Residents Outside Jerusalem

For the villages *located* by their fields, some of the people of Judah lived at Kiriath Arba and its villages, *others* at Dibon and its villages, or at Jekabzeel and its villages, as well as at Jeshua, at Moladah, and at Beth Pelet, and at Hazar Shual, and at Beersheba and its villages, and at Ziklag, at

Mekonah and its villages, and at En Rimmon, at Zorah, at Jarmuth, Zanoah, Adullam and their villages, at Lachish and its fields, and at Azekah and its villages. So they lived from Beersheba as far as the Valley of Hinnom.

Some of the Benjamites settled from Geba onward, at Mikdash, Aija, and Bethel and their villages, at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen.

From the Levites, some divisions in Judah belonged to Benjamin.

The Priests and Levites

Now these are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluk, Hattush, Shekaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah, Mijamin, Moadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah, Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah.

These were the leaders of the priests and of their relatives in the days of Joshua.

Moreover the Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who was over the thanksgiving *songs*, in conjunction with his relatives. There were also their relatives Bakbukiah and Unni, positioned across from each other in the watches. Joshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim was the father of Eliashib, Eliashib was the father of Joiada, Joiada was the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan was the father of Jaddua.

Now in the days of Joiakim, the priests, these were the heads of the fathers' houses: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; of Malluk, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; of Abijah, Zikri; of Miniamin and of Moadiah, Piltai; of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; of Sallu, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah; and of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

The Levites, as well as the priests, were recorded as the chiefs of the fathers' houses in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua during the reign of Darius the Persian. The descendants of Levi who *served* as the chiefs of the fathers' house were recorded in the book of the chronicles until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. The leaders of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers across from them, to praise and to give thanks, section opposite section, according to the commandment of David the man of God.

Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers maintaining the guard duty at the storehouse of the gates. These *leaders* served during the days of Joiakim the son of Joshua, the son of Jozadak, during the days of Nehemiah the governor, and *during the days* of Ezra the priest, the scribe.

1 Chronicles 9:1-34

So all Israel was registered by genealogies, and these were written in the book of the kings of Israel. And Judah was led into exile to Babylon for their unfaithfulness. Now the first ones to dwell in their possessions in their cities were children of Israel, priests, Levites, and temple servants.

A Post-Exilic Genealogy

Some of the sons of Judah dwelt in Jerusalem alongside some of the sons of Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh: Uthai the son of Ammihud, the son of Omri, the son of Imri, the son of Bani, of the sons of Perez the son of Judah; of the Shilonites: Asaiah the firstborn and his sons; of the sons of Zerah: Jeuel and their brothers, six hundred and ninety.

Those of the sons of Benjamin were Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Hodaviah, the son of Hassenuah; Ibneiah the son of Jeroham; Elah the son of Uzzi, the son of Mikri; Meshullam the son of Shephatiah, the son of Reuel, the son of Ibnijah; and their brothers according to their generations, nine hundred and fifty-six. All these men were heads of families according to their fathers' houses.

Those of the priests were Jedaiah, Jehoiarib, Jakin; Azariah the son of Hilkiyah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the head official of the house of God; Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malkijah; Maasai the son of Adiel, the son of Jahzerah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Meshillemith, the son of Immer; and their brothers, heads of the houses of their fathers, one thousand seven hundred and sixty very able men for the work of the service of the house of God.

Those of the Levites were Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, of the sons of Merari; Bakbakkar, Heresh, Galal, and Mattaniah the son of Mika, the son of Zikri, the son of Asaph; Obadiah the son of Shemaiah, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun; Berekiah the son of Asa, the son of Elkanah, who lived in the villages of the Netophathites.

Now the gatekeepers were Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman, and their brothers (Shallum was the head officer who until then had served at the king's eastern gate). They were the gatekeepers for the camps of the Levites. Shallum the son of Kore, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, and his brothers from his father's house, the Korahites, were over the work of the service, gatekeepers of the tabernacle. Their fathers had been over the camp of the LORD, guards at the entrance. Phinehas the son of Eleazar was the official over them in previous times, and the LORD was with him. Zechariah the son of Meshelemiah was gatekeeper at the entrance to the tent of meeting. All those chosen as gatekeepers were two hundred and twelve. They were registered by their genealogy in their villages. Now David and Samuel the seer established them in their trusted offices. So they and their sons were in charge of the gates of the house of the LORD, that is, the house of the tabernacle, as guards. The gatekeepers were on four sides: east, west, north, and south. Their brothers in their villages were to come for seven days from time to time to serve with them. For in their trusted offices the four main gatekeepers who were Levites had charge over the chambers and treasuries of the house of God. They spent the night around the house of God, for the watch was entrusted to them, and they were responsible for opening it every morning. Some of them were in charge of the vessels of service, that they should bring them in and out by number. Some others were appointed over the furnishings and all the implements of the sanctuary as well as the fine flour, the wine, the oil, the frankincense, and the spices. And some of the sons of the priests mixed the ointment of the spices. Mattithiah, one of the Levites (he was the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite), was entrusted with making the flat cakes. Others of the sons of the Kohathites and from their brothers were given charge over the showbread to prepare it every Sabbath. Now these are the singers, heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites, who stayed in the temple chambers, free from other service, because they were occupied with the work day and night. These were the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites according to their generations, leaders, who dwelt in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah Dedicates the City Wall

At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought to bring the Levites from all their places to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication appropriately with thanksgiving songs and singing, accompanied by cymbals, harps, and lyres. The members of choirs had assembled from the regions all around Jerusalem, from the villages of the Netophathites, from Beth Gilgal, and from fields of Geba and Azmaveth, because they had built villages for themselves all around Jerusalem. Then the priests and the Levites purified themselves. They also purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

Then I led the commanders of Judah up to the top of the wall and appointed two great thanksgiving choirs. The first choir proceeded to the right on the wall toward the Dung Gate. Behind them followed Hoshai, and half of the princes of Judah, with Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, and some of the priests with trumpets—Zechariah, the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zakkur, the son of Asaph, in conjunction with his relatives—Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, being accompanied with the musical instruments of David the man of God. Ezra the scribe went before them. At the Fountain Gate, directly across from them, they ascended the steps of the City of David, following that sloped section of the wall up to the house of David, then eastward to the Water Gate.

The second thanksgiving choir proceeded to the left where I followed them with the other half of the people on top of the wall, from the Tower of the Furnaces to the Broad Wall, then from above the Ephraim Gate past the Old Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate, but they stood *still* at the Gate of the Guard.

So the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God, as did I and the half of the officials with me, and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elieoenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets, and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang loudly. Jezrahiah was their director. On that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great cause for rejoicing. The wives and the children rejoiced, too. From far away the joyful celebration of Jerusalem was heard.

Temple Responsibilities

At that time men were appointed to govern over the chambers for the treasures, for the contributions, for the first fruits, and for the tithes, so that they might gather into them out of the fields of the cities the legal portions belonging to the priests and Levites. This was because the celebration of Judah survived on the basis of the priests and the Levites who, accompanied by the singers and the gatekeepers, attentively preserved the practices of their God and the practices of purification, according to the commandment of David and of his son Solomon. For in the former days of David and Asaph there were leaders for the singers, the songs of praise, and thanksgivings to God. All Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah gave the singers and the gatekeepers *their* portions, as specified daily. Likewise, they consecrated what was due to the Levites, who then consecrated what was due to the descendants of Aaron.

The Reforms of Nehemiah

On that day they read aloud from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. In it there was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the congregation of God, because they did not meet the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. When they heard the Law, they separated from Israel all the racially mixed.

Before this, Eliashib the priest, who had been appointed to govern the chambers of the house of our God, was related to Tobiah. So, he had prepared a great chamber hall for him, where previously they

had stored the contributions, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, new wine, and fresh oil, as required, for the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the contribution for the priests.

But during this time I was not in Jerusalem, since in the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes of Babylon I had gone to the king. At the conclusion of those days I requested a leave of the king.

When I came to Jerusalem and understood the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah by preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God, I was very grieved. So, from the chamber I threw all of the household belongings of Tobiah outside. Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers so that I could return there the vessels of the house of God, the contributions for the offerings, and the frankincense.

When I perceived that the supplies for the Levites had not been given and that the Levites and the singers doing the work had fled, everyone to his own field, I confronted the officials and asked, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" So I gathered them and stationed them at their posts.

Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, the new wine, and the fresh oil to the storehouses. Overseeing the replenishing of the storehouse, I appointed Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah from the Levites, and to assist them Hanan the son of Zakkur, the son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable, and their task was to distribute to their relatives.

Remember me, O my God, concerning this. Do not blot out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and its workings.

In those days I saw in Judah some treading winepresses on the Sabbath or hauling loads of grain or loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all manner of burdens in order to bring them to Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So, during the day while they were selling the food goods, I warned them. Men of Tyre also stayed there, having hauled in fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and asked them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do likewise? Did not our God bring all this evil against us and against this city? Will you yet bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath?"

As the gates of Jerusalem began to cast the evening shadow before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. Some of my servants I stationed at the gates so that there would be no loads brought in on the Sabbath day. Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kind of merchandise lodged outside Jerusalem. So I warned them and said to them, "Why do you spend the night next to the wall? If you do so again, I will send you away by force." From that time on they stopped coming on the Sabbath. Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves so that they could come and, as guardians of the gates, sanctify the Sabbath day.

Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to Your abundant mercy.

Moreover, in those days I also saw Jews who had married the women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. Half of their children spoke in the language of Ashdod, yet none of them could recognize the language of the Jews. This was true language by language. So I confronted them and cursed them. Some of the men I beat. Others, I plucked out their hair. Also, I made them swear an oath by God and said to them, "You shall neither give your daughters to their sons, nor marry their daughters to your sons or to yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, who made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women caused even him to sin. Should we then listen to you, the ones doing all this great evil, who are behaving unfaithfully against our God by bedding foreign women?"

Also, one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite, so I drove him away from me.

Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

Thus I purified them from everything foreign and appointed work crews for the priests and the Levites, each to his task, and I provided the wood offering, at the appointed times, and the first fruits.

Remember me, O my God, for good.

Malachi was a prophet who spoke the word of the Lord to the people in Judah and Jerusalem during this post-exile time period. The word “Malachi” means “my messenger,” and probably refers to the prophet’s role, rather than his given name.

Malachi 1-4

The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

Israel Preferred to Edom

I have loved you, says the LORD. But you say, “How have You loved us?” Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? says the LORD. Yet I have loved Jacob; but Esau I have hated, and I have made his mountains a desolation and left his inheritance for the jackals of the desert. Whereas Edom says, “We are impoverished, but we will rebuild the ruins,” thus says the LORD of Hosts: They may build, but I will tear down. They will be called the Wicked Territory, and the people against whom the LORD has indignation forever. Your eyes will see this, and you will say, “Great is the LORD, beyond the border of Israel!”

Profane Offerings

A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My fear? says the LORD of Hosts to you, O priests, who despise My name. But you say, “How have we despised Your name?” You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, “How have we defiled You?”

By saying, “The table of the LORD is contemptible.” When you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? When you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it now to your governor! Would he be pleased with you or accept you? says the LORD of Hosts.

But now entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will He accept you favorably? says the LORD of Hosts.

Who is there among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of Hosts, nor will I accept an offering from your hand. For from the rising of the sun to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in

every place incense will be offered to My name, and a pure offering. For My name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of Hosts.

But you profane it, in that you say, “The table of the Lord is defiled, and its fruit, that is, its food is contemptible.” You also say, “What a weariness it is,” and you snort at it, says the LORD of Hosts.

You bring in what is stolen, the lame, or the sick; thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand? says the LORD. But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and vows, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great king, says the LORD of Hosts, and My name is to be feared among the nations.

Divine Warnings to the Priests

And now, O priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not listen, and if you will not take it to heart to give honor to My name, says the LORD of Hosts, I will send a curse on you and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take it to heart.

I rebuke your descendants, and spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts, and you will be taken away with it. And you will know that I have sent this command to you, that My covenant with Levi may remain, says the LORD of Hosts. My covenant with him was for life and peace, and I gave them to him. With awe he feared Me, and he was reverent before My name. True instruction was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and with uprightness and turned many away from iniquity.

For a priest’s lips should preserve knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the LORD of Hosts. But you have departed from the way. You have caused many to stumble at the law. You have violated the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of Hosts. So I have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept My ways, but have shown partiality in the law.

The Covenant Profaned

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another, by profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, teacher and student, yet who brings an offering to the LORD of Hosts.

This is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying out, because He no longer regards the offering, nor receives it with good will from your hand. ¹Yet you say, “Why?” It is because the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously. Yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

Did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.

For the LORD, the God of Israel, says that He hates divorce; for it covers one’s garment with violence, says the LORD of Hosts.

Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously.

Injustice Committed

You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, “How have we wearied Him?”

When you say, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,” or, “Where is the God of justice?”

The Coming Messenger

I will send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. He is coming, says the LORD of Hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them like gold and silver, and they will present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against the perjurers, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who turn aside the stranger, and do not fear Me, says the LORD of Hosts.

Withholding Tithes

For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of Hosts. But you say, “How shall we return?”

Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me. But you say, “How have we robbed You?”

In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, your whole nation, for you are robbing Me. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says the LORD of Hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing, that *there will not be room enough to receive it*. I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that it will not destroy the fruit of your ground, and the vines in your field will not fail to bear fruit, says the LORD of Hosts. Then all the nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land, says the LORD of Hosts.

Your words have been hard against Me, says the LORD. Yet you say, “What have we spoken against You?”

You said, “It is vain to serve God. What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of Hosts? And now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are built up; they even test God and escape.”

The Reward of the Faithful

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another. The LORD listened and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name. They shall be Mine, says the LORD of Hosts, on the day when I make up My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then you will again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

The Great Day of the LORD

Surely the day is coming, burning like an oven; all the proud, yes, all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming will burn them up, says the LORD of Hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. You will go out and grow up like calves from the stall. And you will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I do this, says the LORD of Hosts.

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, the statutes and judgments which I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

See, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreaded day of the LORD. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

The other prophet in Judah during this post-exile time that is recorded in Scripture is Joel...

Joel 1-3

The word of the LORD, which came to Joel, son of Pethuel.

A Land Laid Waste

Hear this, elders, and give ear, all inhabitants of the land!
Has anything like this happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?
Tell it to your children, and let your children tell their children,
and let their children tell another generation.

What the fledging locust left, the adult locust has eaten;
what the adult locust left, the larval locust has eaten;
what the larval locust left, the hopper locust has eaten.

Awaken, drunkards, and weep! Wail, all wine-drinkers,
because the sweet wine has been cut off from your lips.
For a nation powerful and innumerable has invaded my land;
its teeth are like the teeth of a lion, like the fangs of a lioness.

It has despoiled my vine, and splintered my fig tree;
it has stripped off its bark and cast it away, leaving its branches white.

Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the husband of her youth.
The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the LORD;
the priests mourn, who are ministers to the LORD.

The field is ravaged, the ground mourns;
for the grain is ruined, the new wine is dried up, and the oil dwindles.

Despair, fieldworkers; wail, vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley,
because the harvest of the field has perished.
The vine is dried up, and the fig tree is withered;
pomegranate, palm, and apple— all the trees of the field are dry;
surely joy has withered away from the sons of men.

A Call to Repentance

Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, ministers of the altar.
Come, spend the night in sackcloth, ministers of my God,
because the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.
Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, assemble the elders and all the inhabitants of the land
to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.

Alas, for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and like devastation from the Almighty it comes.
Has not the food been cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God?
The seeds have shriveled under their shovels, the storehouses have been deserted;
the granaries have been torn down, because the grain has dried up.

How the beasts groan!

The herds of cattle are confused, because they have no pasture; even the flocks of sheep suffer.

To You, O LORD, I call, because fire has devoured the wild pastures,
and flame has burned all the trees of the field.
Even the beasts of the field long for You, because the streams of water have dried up,
and fire has devoured the wild pastures.

The Day of the LORD

Blow the ram's horn in Zion, sound the alarm on My holy mountain!

All the inhabitants of the earth will tremble,
because the day of the LORD has come, because it is near—
a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.
Like blackness spreading over the mountain, a great and mighty army comes,
such as was never before, and will never be again,
even through the years of all generations.

Before them fire devours, and behind them a flame blazes;
the land is like the garden of Eden before them,
but behind them a desolate wasteland, and nothing escapes them.
They have the appearance of horses, and like cavalry they run.
As with the sound of chariots, they leap on the mountaintops,
as with the sound of a flame of fire consuming stubble, as a mighty army arrayed for war.

Before them, peoples are tormented; every face turns pale.
Like mighty men they run, like men of war they scale a wall;
each marches on his way, they do not swerve from their paths.
They do not jostle one another; each marches in his track.
Through the weapons they plunge; they do not break rank.

They rush on the city, they run on the wall;
they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like thieves.

Before them the earth quakes, the heavens shake;
the sun and moon darken, and the stars withdraw their radiance.

The LORD has sounded His voice before His army,
for His camp is exceedingly great; mighty is the one who accomplishes His word.
For great is the day of the LORD, and very awe-inspiring.
Who can endure it?

Return to the LORD

Yet even now, declares the LORD, return to Me with all your heart,
and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning.

Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God,
for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and He relents from punishing.

Who knows? He might turn aside and relent, and He might leave behind a blessing—
a grain offering and a food offering for the LORD your God.

Blow the ram's horn in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly.

Gather the people, consecrate the congregation,
assemble the elders, gather the children and those nursing at the breast;
let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber.

Between the temple porch and the altar, let the priests, ministers of the LORD, weep and say,
“Have pity upon Your people, and do not make Your heritage a disgrace,
a mockery among the nations.

Why should they say among the peoples, “Where is their God?” ”

Rescue and Restitution

Then the LORD became jealous for His land and took pity upon His people.

So the LORD answered and said to His people,

Here! I am sending you grain, new wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied,
and I will never again make you a disgrace among the nations.

I will remove the northerner far from you, and I will banish him to a dry and desolate land,
those in front to the eastern sea, and those in back to the western sea,
and his stink will rise, and his stench will rise, for he has done great things.

Do not be afraid, land; exult and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things!

Do not be afraid, beasts of the field, because the wild pastures flourish,
because the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their abundance.

And children of Zion, exult and rejoice in the LORD your God,
because He has given to you the early rain for vindication.

He showers down rains for you, he early rain and the latter rain, as before.

Then the threshing floors will be filled with grain, and the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.

And I will compensate you for the years the locusts have eaten—
the larval locust, the hopper locust, and the fledging locust—
My great army which I sent against you.
You will eat abundantly and be satisfied, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has worked wonders for you; and My people will never again be shamed.
Then you will know that I am in the midst of Israel,
that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other.
And My people will never again be shamed.

The Outpouring of the Spirit

And it will be that, afterwards, I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
then your sons and your daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams,
and your young men will see visions.
Even on the menservants and maidservants in those days I will pour out My Spirit.
Then I will work wonders in the heavens and the earth— blood and fire and columns of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood,
before the great and awe-inspiring day of the LORD comes.
And it will be that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.
For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance,
as the LORD has said, and among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

Judging the Nations

In those days and at that time,
when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,
I will gather all the nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.
I will enter into judgment with them there regarding My people and My heritage Israel,
whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land.
They have cast lots for My people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute;
they have sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.
Also, what are you to Me, Tyre and Sidon and all the regions of Philistia?
Are you repaying Me for something?
If you are repaying Me, I will return your payment swiftly and speedily on your head.
For you have taken My silver and My gold,
and you have carried off My finest treasures to your temples.
You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks
in order to remove them far from their border.
I am about to rouse them from the place to which you have sold them,
and I will return your payment on your head.
I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah,
and they will sell them to the Sabeans—to a distant nation, for the LORD has spoken.
Proclaim this among the nations: Consecrate a war!
Stir up the mighty men! Let all the men of war draw near and rise.
Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears;

let the weakling say, "I am a warrior!"
Hurry and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather there.

Bring down Your warriors, O LORD.

Let the nations be roused, and go up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat;
for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.

Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.

Come and tread, for the winepress is full.

The wine vats overflow, because their evil is great.

Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision!

For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of the decision.

The sun and moon darken, and the stars withdraw their radiance.

The LORD roars from Zion, and sounds His voice from Jerusalem,
and heaven and earth quake.

But the LORD is a refuge for His people, and a stronghold for the children of Israel.

The LORD Dwells in Zion

Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who dwells in Zion, My holy mountain.
And Jerusalem will be holy, and invaders will never again pass through her.

And it will be that in that day the mountains will drip sweet wine,
and the hills will flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah will flow with water;
a spring will proceed from the house of the LORD and will water the Valley of Shittim.

Egypt will become a desolation, and Edom a desolate wasteland,
because of the violence done to the people of Judah—
they shed innocent blood in their land.

But Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem for generations and generations.
I will avenge their blood, which I have not yet avenged.

The LORD dwells in Zion!

Congratulations!! You have read the entire Old Testament!