

Superina Paolo

HAGGAI
ZECHARIAH
EZRA
NEHEMIAH
MALACHI

Post-exilic prophets of Yahweh

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**THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
AND
THE UNIVERSAL COMMUNION**

In the Name of the Father and of His Son, Jesus Christ



As, at the beginning, there was perfect harmony between Yahweh and His whole creation, so it will be at the end, when all will live a new life of full spiritual communion with Yahweh and with each other

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In the Name of the Father
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Post-exilic prophets of Yahweh

**A simple study, to understand who they were,
what they did, and why.**

Text based on:

The Holy Bible. New International Version

Notes and explanations based on:

The Study Bible. New International Version

The Bible Knowledge Commentary. Dallas Theological Seminary

Thoughts. Superina Paolo

Superina Paolo

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

What follows is not intended and does not want to be a new or original study of some Old Testament Books, but simply what I have learned of and from them, then put in writing.

NOTE: The original text of these books, mainly taken from the New International Version of the Bible, is edited by:

- giving back to God His name: Yahweh,
- eliminating all unnecessary repetitions. Sometimes this gives less strength to the text, but makes it much clearer (at least to me) and facilitates my understanding of it,
- introducing minor modifications to the text to make it flow better,
- adding in [...] whatever word can improve the understanding of the text.

In case of difficult passages, the Bible of Jerusalem, the New Revised and the Roman Catholic versions are also taken into account.

Dates of events are approximate and can vary depending on the interpretative theories of various scholars.

The word “love” (and its derivatives: to love, loved, etc.) is used in many situations and takes on many, even deeply different meanings. In this book it is used only in two cases: 1) In the man-woman relationship. 2) In the parents-children relationship. In all other cases, other words are used, depending on the context: affection, fondness, benevolence, goodwill, to be fond of, to cherish, to like, etc.

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General Introduction

Yahweh had promised the Israelites that if they obeyed Him, He would bless them as a nation. If they did not, then He would judge them and cause them to be taken into captivity (Deuteronomy 28). That promise was repeated to Solomon with a specific application to his own life. If he, as a king of Israel, obeyed Yahweh he would experience His continual blessing. If Solomon did not obey Him, Yahweh would take away his power and position as king of Israel (1 Kings 9:1-9).

As it happened so frequently with many of Israel's leaders, a good beginning had a bad ending. Solomon sinned, particularly by marrying many foreign wives and worshiping their false gods (1 Kings 11:1-5). So the kingdom was split in 931 BC. The 10 Northern tribes were initially ruled by Jeroboam, and the 2 Southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) by Rehoboam.

Both kingdoms, however, continued to be characterized by idolatry and immorality. And, as Yahweh had forewarned, His judgment fell on all Israelites because of their sins. The Northern Kingdom fell first and its people were taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722 BC. The Southern Kingdom fell later, in 586 BC, by the hands of the Babylonians.

The Israelites of the Northern Kingdom were absorbed into Assyria and eventually into other cultures. The people of the Southern Kingdom, however, remained culturally united in Babylon and, after the power of Babylon was broken by the Medes and the Persians in 539 BC, many Jews returned to their homeland.

In 537 BC the first group returned to Judah under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1-2:2). Pushed by the prophets Haggai and, shortly later, Zechariah, over a period of many years and facing the heavy opposition of the Samaritans, the returnees eventually succeeded in rebuilding the Temple in 516 BC.

A number of years later -in 458 BC- a second group of Jews returned, led by Ezra (Ezra 7:1-10). Arriving in Judah, they found the Jews living there in a state of spiritual and moral degradation. They had intermarried with the pagan peoples of the surrounding nations and were participating in their pagan practices. However, through Ezra's faithful teaching ministry, the majority of these people turned away from their sins and once again followed Yahweh's will.

In 445 BC, 14 years after Ezra's return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah also returned with a third group and Yahweh used him to guide Judah in rebuilding the city's walls and in reordering the people's social and economic lives. Yet, shortly after Nehemiah's return to Persia in 433 BC, the Jews fell back into their usual sins, as denounced by the last prophet of the Old testament, Malachi.

The Book of Haggai, a prophet of Yahweh

Author

Haggai was the first of the two prophets (the other was Zechariah) who encouraged the exiles returned from the Babylonian captivity to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem.

Haggai (nothing is known about when and where he was born) was among those who returned to Jerusalem in 537 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua. He was a contemporary of Zechariah but his ministry was limited to a period of four months in 520 BC.

Background

In 538 BC Cyrus the Great, the king of Persia, the conqueror of Babylon, issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (destroyed in 586 BC by the Babylonian armies). Led by Zerubbabel, and accompanied by Joshua the high priest and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, about 50,000 Jews moved from Babylon to Jerusalem and began working on the Temple. Levitical sacrifices were soon re-instituted on a rebuilt altar of burnt offering. At the completion of the Temple foundation, in about two years, the Samaritans and other enemies who feared a possible new Jewish state, opposed strongly the project and managed to stop the work for about 16 years until Darius the Great became king of Persia in 522 BC. Darius was willing to grant freedom of religion to all peoples in his empire and, in the second year of his reign (520 BC), Haggai and then Zechariah began to preach the necessity of completing the new Temple (of which only the foundations were built), accusing the Jews of spiritual apathy and lazy inactivity. When the governor of Trans-Euphrates and other officials tried to interfere with the rebuilding, Darius fully supported the Jews. The Temple was completed and dedicated in 516 BC.

Dates

The messages of Haggai were given during a four-month period (from August 29 to December 18) in 520 BC, the second year of king Darius.

Theme and teaching

Chapter 1 shows the consequences of disobedience and chapter 2 of obedience. Obedience brings the encouragement and strength of Yahweh (of His Spirit, that is, of the spiritual communion Yahweh-man).

Chapter 2 also speaks of the coming of the Messiah (the "[One] desired of all nations"). His coming will fill the new Temple with glory. The following passages are linked with the judgment of the nations at the Messiah's second coming. Then Yahweh declares that he has made Zerubbabel His "signet ring" as a guarantee that the Messiah would come.

The Book of Haggai**A call to build the House of Yahweh (1:1-15)**

(1:1) In the second year of the King Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the word of Yahweh came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, son of Shealtiel, and to Joshua, the high priest, son of Jehozadak:

(1:2) This is what Yahweh the Almighty says: "These people say: 'The time has not yet come for the House of Yahweh to be built.'

(1:3-4) Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this House remains a ruin?

(1:5) Give careful thought to your ways. **(1:6)** You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.

(1:7-8) Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build My House, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored. **(1:9)** You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why? Because of My House, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. **(1:10)** Therefore, because of you, the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. **(1:11)** I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands."

(1:12) Then Zerubbabel, Joshua the high priest, and the whole remnant of the people obeyed the voice of Yahweh their God and the message of the prophet Haggai, because Yahweh their God had sent him. And the people feared Yahweh.

(1:13) Then Haggai, Yahweh's messenger, gave this message of Yahweh to the people: "I am with you." **(1:14)** So Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the House of Yahweh the Almighty, their God, **(1:15)** on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius.

(1:1) *Second year... first day... sixth month:* August 29 (1 Elul), 520 BC. It was the day of the new moon, a holy festival day in Jerusalem. This provided Haggai with a ready audience to listen to the first word of Yahweh that broke the post-exilic prophetic silence. *King Darius:* Darius Hystaspis (or Hystaspes) ruled Persia from 522 to 486 BC. *The word of Yahweh:* A classical phrase for prophetic revelation. *Prophet:* One called by Yahweh to be

His spokesman. *Zerubbabel*: He was the legitimate heir to the throne of David, because he was the grandson of king Jehoiachin taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon in 586 BC. *Joshua*: His father, Jehozadak had been the high priest taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon in 586 BC.

(1:2) *These people say...*: Even though they were back in Jerusalem, they did not obey Yahweh, particularly with regard to the rebuilding of the Temple. To say "These people" instead of "My people" implies a divine rebuke because they did not act like Yahweh's people.

(1:3-4) *Paneled houses*: The Jews of Jerusalem were building or planning to build comfortable houses for themselves, without worrying about the condition of the Temple.

(1:5) *Give careful...*: Consider carefully what you are doing, or not.

(1:6) *Planted much... harvested little*: A curse for their disobedience. *Eat, but... drink, but... put on clothes, but...*: Pointing to the futility in all of their activities. *Earn wages, only to...*: Those were times of famine, and the prices were rising sharply. The overall implication is that all these negative circumstances were divine punishment for their disobedience, as clearly stated by vv. 1:9-11.

(1:7-8) *Go up... and bring... and build...*: An order to procure what material was still necessary and to proceed with the building of the Temple. The need for bringing timber down from the mountains implies that they had used up for their own houses the timber purchased for rebuilding the Temple a few years earlier. *I may take pleasure... and be honored*: An obedient nation would bring praise and honor to Yahweh.

(1:9-11) *You expected much, but...*: Their expectations, after regaining freedom, were high, but their disobedience -neglecting their responsibilities and not working on the reconstruction of the Temple- brought Yahweh's punishment, the famine of v. 1:6. *Withheld their dew*: In the dry season (April-October) morning dew, often heavy in Palestine, was essential to the growth of summer crops. So the absence of dew was devastating.

(1:12) *The whole remnant*: All the Jews who went back to Jerusalem, yet only part of those living in Babylon. *Feared...*: Showing the usual reverence, respect and obedience the Jews always showed after a period of divine punishment.

(1:13) *Messenger*: A title for angels and prophets, stating their condition of holiness and spiritual communion with Yahweh. *I am with you*: To assure them that, whatever the difficulties, the rebuilding of the Temple would be successful.

(1:14) *Stirred up the spirit of...*: In Old Testament times, the spiritual communion Yahweh-man was possible only in case of His initiative, while, in New Testament times, it is fully open to each man's initiative.

(1:15) *Twenty-fourth day of the sixth month*: September 21 (24 Elul), 520 BC. The delay of twenty-three days between the prophecy and the resumption of the work has two possible explanations: a period of planning and gathering of materials preceded the actual reconstruction; in the same period there was the harvest of figs, grapes and pomegranates.

The promised glory of the new House (2:1-9)

(2:1) On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the word of Yahweh came through the prophet Haggai: **(2:2)** "Speak to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people. Ask them, **(2:3)** 'Who of you is left who saw this House in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?' **(2:4)** But now be strong, O Zerubbabel. Be strong, O Joshua. Be strong, all you people of the land, and work. For I am with you. **(2:5)** This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And My Spirit remains among you. Do not fear.

(2:6) In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. **(2:7)** I will shake all nations, and the [One] desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this House with [My] glory. **(2:8)** The silver is mine and the gold is mine. **(2:9)** The glory of this present House will be greater than the glory of the former House. And in this place I will grant peace."

(2:1) *Twenty-first day of the seventh month*: October 17 (21 Tishri), 520 BC. It was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, a time to celebrate the summer harvest, even though the crops were meager. This was nearly a month after the people had resumed the rebuilding of the Temple. In this period the progress in rebuilding was slow, no doubt because of the laborious task of cleaning up 60 years of rubble and the cessation of work during the numerous festivals of the seventh month (the weekly Sabbaths, the Feast of Trumpets on the first day, the Day of Atonement on the tenth, and the Feast of Booths -or Tabernacles- from Tishri 15 to 21, with Tishri 22 being a rest day).

(2:2-3) *Speak to...*: This second message by Haggai was addressed to those who had begun the rebuilding. The reason for it was their unfavorable comparison of the temple under construction with the pre-exilic Temple of

Solomon. (A similar problem occurred when the foundation of the Temple had been laid few years earlier). *Who of you is left who...?:* Some of the older exiles had seen Solomon's Temple, destroyed by the Babylonians 66 years earlier. *Does it not seem... like nothing?:* All of these questions are essentially rhetorical, causing the people to face openly the fact that their Temple was not going to be as splendid as Solomon's.

(2:4) *Be strong... work... I am with you:* Again the assurance that, whatever the difficulties, the rebuilding of the Temple would be successful.

(2:5) *My Spirit remains among you:* The equivalent of "I am with you."

(2:6-7) *I will... shake...:* A traditional depiction of Yahweh's intervention in the affairs of the world. It is first, an announcement of some important event not so far in the future (as, for example, the fall of Persia to Alexander the Great in 333-330 BC), then of the future eternal glory of Yahweh's Temple at the second coming of His Messiah. *The [One] desired of all nations:* Yahweh's Messiah. *Fill this House with [My] glory:* When the Messiah, Jesus Christ, will come, Yahweh's presence in the Temple -His glory- will be evident as never before.

(2:8) *Silver... gold:* Yahweh would provide for Zerubbabel Temple as He had done for Solomon's one.

(2:9) *Glory... greater:* Because the Messiah will be present in this Temple. By building this Temple the people would help Yahweh's program of manifesting Himself to humanity. *I will grant peace:* Jesus Christ's sacrifice will save -bring peace to- the whole human race.

Blessings for a defiled people (2:10-19)

(2:10) On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to the prophet Haggai: **(2:11)** "This is what Yahweh the Almighty says: 'Ask the priests what the law says: **(2:12)** If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some bread or stew, some wine, oil or other food, does it become consecrated?'"

The priests answered, "No."

(2:13) Then Haggai said, "If a person defiled by contact with a dead body touches one of these things, does it become defiled?"

"Yes," the priests replied, "it becomes defiled."

(2:14) Then Haggai said, "Yahweh declares: 'So it is with this people and this nation in My sight, whatever they do and whatever they offer there is defiled.'

(2:15) Now consider how things were before, from this day on, one stone was laid on another in My Temple. **(2:16)** When anyone was expecting twenty measures of wheat, there were only ten. When anyone was expecting fifty measures of wine, there were only twenty. **(2:17)** I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to Me. **(2:18)** Give careful thought to what happened until this day, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, the day when the foundation of My Temple was laid. **(2:19)** Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit.

From this day on I will bless you."

(2:10) *Twenty-fourth day... ninth month:* December 18 (24 Kislev), 520 BC. This is the third message, coming two months after the second. During these two months also the prophet Zechariah had begun his ministry.

(2:11-12) *Consecrated meat... does it become consecrated?:* A question about transmitting holiness. Consecrated meat made the garment "holy" because it was in direct contact with the garment, but the garment could not pass on the holiness to a third object.

(2:13) *Defiled... does it become defiled?:* To the Jews, ceremonial uncleanness was transmitted much more easily than holiness. Anything touched by an unclean person became unclean.

(2:14) *So it is with this people... whatever they do and... is defiled:* Even though the Jews were back in the Holy Land, that holiness did not make them pure. To be pure, they needed to obey Yahweh, particularly with regard to rebuilding the Temple. Their disobedience rendered even sacrificial worship unacceptable.

(2:15-16) *Consider how things were... When anyone... there were...:* The poor harvests were related to the sin of the people, that is, of not continuing the rebuilding of the Temple.

(2:17) *Blight, mildew and hail:* Curses for their disobedience. For an agricultural society such punishments were catastrophic to the economy and to survival.

(2:18) *What happened until this day, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month:* A warning not to fall again. The divine blessing, present at the time when the foundation of the Temple was laid in 536 BC, was withheld for 16 years.

(2:19) *Vine... fig tree... pomegranate... olive tree. I will bless you:* This harvests, like the earlier crops, had produced little. But, by continuing the rebuilding of the Temple, Yahweh's blessing and future abundance were assured.

Zerubbabel the signet ring of Yahweh (2:20-23)

(2:20) The word of Yahweh came to Haggai a second time on the twenty-fourth day of the month: **(2:21)** "Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the earth. **(2:22)** I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother.

(2:23) On that day, I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you."

(2:20-22) *Tell Zerubbabel...*: This is Haggai's fourth and last message, received on the same day as the third one. But this one is addressed only to Zerubbabel who needed encouragement to lead this seemingly insignificant group of Jews who resided in a corner of the vast Persian Empire. *I will shake... I will overturn...*: A classical description of the last battle, with all nations fighting against Israel, in the last days.

(2:23) *On that day*: The Day of Yahweh, the time of judgment or blessing when He will intervene decisively in the affairs of the nations. *My servant*: A term applied to prophets, political leaders, and the Messiah. *Signet ring*: A ring with a kind of seal that functioned as a signature. *Chosen you*: The meaning is that Zerubbabel would be a guarantee that someday the Messiah descendant from David will come. Therefore now Yahweh's people are to be faithful to the task to which He has called them.

The Book of Zechariah, a prophet of Yahweh

Author

Zechariah was the second of the two prophets (the other was Haggai) who encouraged the exiles returned from the Babylonian captivity to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem.

Zechariah was not only a prophet, but also a priest. He was born in Babylon and was among those who returned to Jerusalem in 537 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua. He was a contemporary of Haggai but much younger and continued his ministry long after him.

Background

In 538 BC Cyrus the Great, the king of Persia, the conqueror of Babylon, issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple (destroyed in 586 BC by the Babylonian armies). Led by Zerubbabel and accompanied by Joshua the high priest and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, about 50,000 Jews moved from Babylon to Jerusalem and began working on the Temple. Levitical sacrifices were soon reinstated on a rebuilt altar of burnt offering. At the completion of the foundation, in about two years, the Samaritans and other enemies who feared a possible new Jewish state, opposed strongly the project and managed to stop the work for about 16 years until Darius the Great became king of Persia in 522 BC. Darius was willing to grant freedom of religion to all peoples in his empire and, in the second year of his reign (520 BC), Haggai and then Zechariah began to preach the necessity of completing the new Temple (of which only the foundations were ready), accusing the Jews of spiritual apathy and lazy inactivity. When the governor of Trans-Euphrates and other official tried to interfere with the rebuilding, Darius fully supported the Jews. The Temple was completed and dedicated in 516 BC.

Dates

The messages of Zechariah were given throughout a period of many years and are, in a way, linked to the messages of Haggai. The sequence of messages and historical events is as follows:

Haggai's first message (Hag 1:1-11)	Aug. 29, 520 BC
Resumption of the building of the Temple (Hag 1:12-15)	Sept. 21, 520
Haggai's second message (Hag 2:1-9)	Oct. 17, 520
Beginning of Zechariah's preaching (Zec 1:1-6)	Oct./Nov. 520
Haggai's third message (Hag 2:10-19)	Dec. 18, 520
Haggai's fourth message (Hag 2:20-23)	Dec. 18, 520
Tattenai's letter to Darius for rebuilding the Temple (Ezra 5:3-6:14)	519
Zechariah's eight night visions (Zec 1:7-6:8)	Feb. 15, 519

Joshua crowned (Zec 6:9-15)	After Feb. 16, 519
Repentance urged, blessing promised (Zec chs. 7-8)	Dec. 7, 518
Dedication of the Temple (Ezra 6:15-18)	Mar. 12, 516
Zechariah final prophecy (Zec chs. 9-14)	Years later.

Theme and teaching

The first and main purpose of Zechariah (and of Haggai) is to rebuke the Jews for their inactivity and to convince them to complete the rebuilding of the Temple. Then he speaks at length about the necessity of their spiritual renewal and of their return to Yahweh, by which He would return to them and continue to fulfill His promises. Furthermore, there is a prophecy related to the coming of the Messiah, with his humanity, rejection and betrayal for thirty pieces of silver, his death and coming in glory, and his opening of Yahweh's everlasting Kingdom to everybody.

The Book of Zechariah

A call to return to Yahweh (1:1-6)

(1:1) In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo:

(1:2) "Yahweh was very angry with your forefathers. **(1:3)** Therefore tell the people: This is what Yahweh the Almighty says: 'Return to Me, and I will return to you. **(1:4)** Do not be like your forefathers, to whom the earlier prophets proclaimed: 'Turn from your evil ways and your evil practices.' But they would not listen or pay attention to Me. **(1:5)** Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, do they live for ever? **(1:6)** But did not My words and My decrees, which I commanded My servants the prophets, overtake your forefathers?'"

Then they repented and said, "Yahweh the Almighty has done to us what our ways and practices deserve, just as He determined to do."

(1:1) *Eighth month of the second year:* October-November 520 BC. The eighth month of the Persian calendar began October 27. *Darius:* Darius Hystaspis (or Hystaspes), ruled Persia from 522 to 486 BC. *The word of Yahweh:* A classical phrase for prophetic revelation. *Prophet:* A man called by Yahweh to be His spokesman.

(1:2) *Very angry with your forefathers:* Because of the covenant-breaking sins of the preexilic Jews, resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BC, followed by the exile to Babylon. As we can see, Yahweh has genuine emotions; to deny this fact is to deprive Him of one of the clear marks of personality.

(1:3-4) *Return to Me, and I will return to you:* Whereas the sins of their

forefathers were responsible for the destruction of the Temple, their own sins had resulted in the delay in rebuilding the Temple. If the Jews of Zechariah's days would go in the opposite direction from that of their forefathers, Yahweh would return to them with His blessings. *Earlier prophets:* Such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who always preached the necessity of repentance.

(1:5-6) *Where are your forefathers? The prophets, do they live forever? Did not My words... overtake your forefathers?:* Obviously, their ancestors and the prophets died, but Yahweh's words the prophets pronounced live on to be fulfilled. *They repented:* After hearing Zechariah's words, the people recognized their sins and their consequences.

The man among the myrtle trees (1:7-17)

(1:7) On the twenty-fourth day of the eleven month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah, the son of Iddo.

(1:8) During the night I [Zechariah] had a vision -and there before me there was a man-[angel] riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses [with their man-angel riders].

(1:9) I asked, "What are these, my lord?"

The angel, who was talking with me, answered, "I will show you what they are."

(1:10) Then the man-[angel] standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones Yahweh has sent to go throughout the earth."

(1:11) And they reported to the angel of Yahweh, who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace."

(1:12) Then the angel of Yahweh said, "Yahweh Almighty, how long will You withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which You have been angry with these seventy years?" **(1:13)** So Yahweh spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.

(1:14) Then the angel who was speaking to me said, "Proclaim this word: This is what Yahweh the Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, **(1:15)** but I am very angry with the nations that now feel secure. I was only a little angry [with Jerusalem], but they added [of their own] to the calamity.'

(1:16) Therefore, this is what Yahweh says: 'I will return to Jerusalem with mercy, and there My House will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem'.

(1:17) Proclaim further: This is what Yahweh the Almighty says: 'My

towns will again overflow with prosperity, and I will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem."

(1:7) *Twenty-fourth day of... Shebat:* February 15, 519 BC, five months after the rebuilding of the Temple was resumed and about three months after Zechariah's first prophecy (v. 1:1).

(1:8-17) In this verses there is the first of eight consecutive visions. The meaning of this one is that, although His people are troubled while the oppressing nations are at ease, Yahweh is concerned for His people and will restore them, their towns and the Temple.

(1:8) *During the night:* Zechariah had all eight visions during one night. *Vision:* Not a dream, all the visions were given when Zechariah was fully awake. *A man riding:* An angel, as explained in v. 1:11. The primary focus on him suggests that he was the leader of the horsemen. *Among the myrtle trees in a ravine:* Possibly in the Kidron Valley southeast of Jerusalem where these shrubs were abundant. *Red horse. Red, brown and white horses:* It seems that these colors had a clear significance, so clear not to be stated. Yet, this significance eludes completely our present knowledge. Furthermore, the traditional significance of these colors (Red = war and bloodshed; Brown = pestilence and plagues; White = triumph and victory) does not seem appropriate here.

(1:9-10) *What are these? The angel... answered:* The angel answered showing Zechariah the meaning of the vision by allowing the leader of the horsemen to speak. *They are...:* They were the angels sent by Yahweh to monitor the situation all around the earth.

(1:11) *Found the whole world at rest and in peace:* The patrol had completed its assignment and found the earth (here, the Persian Empire) peacefully inhabited and at rest from war. Anyway, the peace that existed during the second year of Darius was the result of Persian oppression and injustice, so it was not good news for the Israelites who were under foreign domination.

(1:12) *The angel... said...:* The intercession of the angel is quite unusual as his normal role is representing Yahweh to the people rather than representing the people to Him. *How long...?:* This lament formula expresses the deep need of Israel to have Yahweh acting in their behalf. *Seventy years:* Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed 68 years before; 70 is thus just a round number.

(1:13) *Kind and comforting words:* Those of vv. 1:14-17.

(1:14) *Very jealous:* Yahweh's jealously -jealous affection- concerns His people and assumes the covenant relationship as His exclusive right to possess Israel and to claim her faithfulness. This jealous affection was expres-

sed against Judah for 70 years, but His anger now has turned toward the enemy nations.

(1:15) *Only a little angry, but they added to the calamity:* Yahweh was angry with His people and used the Assyrians and the Babylonians to punish them, but those Empires went too far by trying to destroy the Jews as a people.

(1:16-17) *Therefore...:* Because of Yahweh's affection for Israel and His anger toward their oppressors. *I will return... with mercy:* As already declared in v. 1:3, forgiving their past sins. *Measuring line:* A symbol of physical reconstruction and spiritual restoration. *I will again... choose Jerusalem:* As the place of His presence on earth, that is, in the Temple to be rebuilt.

The four horns and the four blacksmiths (1:18-21)

(1:18) Then I looked up -and there before me were four horns [nations]!

(1:19) I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these?"

He answered to me, "These are the horns [nations] that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem."

(1:20) Then Yahweh showed me four blacksmiths. **(1:21)** I asked, "What are these coming to do?"

[The angel] answered, "The horns [are the nations] that scattered Judah so that no one could raise his head, but the blacksmiths have come to terrify them and throw down these nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people."

(1:18-21) In this verses there is the second of eight consecutive visions. The meaning is that the nations that devastated Israel will in their turn be destroyed by other nations.

(1:18-19) *Four horns:* Israel's four old enemies, Assyria, Egypt, Babylonia and Persia. Here the horns are symbolic of the power of those nations. *Judah, Israel and Jerusalem:* To denote that the whole people of Yahweh went into exile.

(1:20-21) *Four craftsmen:* Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome (with the two new oppressing empires that succeeded those of v. 1:19). Anyway, what is clear is that all Judah's enemies will ultimately be defeated, mostly by fighting each other. To note that the Hebrew word for blacksmiths indicates workmen skilled in wood, stone or metal. Among these, the blacksmiths are the "stronger" category.

A man with a measuring line (2:1-13)

(2:1) Then I looked up -and there before me was a man-[angel] with a measuring line in his hand! **(2:2)** I asked, "Where are you going?"

He answered me: "To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is."

(2:3) Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him **(2:4)** and said to him: "Run, tell that young man [Zechariah], 'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it.'"

(2:5) And Yahweh declares, "I myself will be a wall of fire around it and I will be its glory within."

(2:6) Come! Come! Flee from the land of the North, for I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven.

(2:7) Come, O Zion! Escape, you who live in the Daughter of Babylon!"

(2:8) And Yahweh declares to the nations that have plundered you: **(2:9)** "I will surely raise My hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them -for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye.

(2:10) Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you. **(2:11)** Many nations will be joined with Yahweh in that day and will become My people."

I [Zechariah] am living among you and you know that Yahweh the Almighty has sent me to you. **(2:12)** Yahweh will inherit Judah as His portion in the Holy Land and will again choose Jerusalem. **(2:13)** Be still before Yahweh, all mankind, because He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling.

(2:1-13) In these verses there is the third of eight consecutive visions. The meaning is that there will be full restoration and blessing for the Jews, the Temple and Jerusalem.

(2:1-2) *Measuring line*: A symbol of physical reconstruction and spiritual restoration. The survey purpose, as indicated by the answer to Zechariah's question, was to mark out the boundaries of Jerusalem, from which the future expansion would progress.

(2:3-4) *Young man: Zechariah. Jerusalem will be... without walls*: The number of people faithful to Yahweh will be so great that it will not make sense to erect traditional defensive walls.

(2:5) *I myself... a wall of fire*. Symbolic of divine protection. Jerusalem will overflow its boundaries because of divine blessing and will need no fortifications or protections because of Yahweh's presence. *Glory within*: Yahweh, His Glory, will be present in the Tabernacle of the rebuilt Temple.

(2:6) *Flee from the land of the north*: Yahweh is urging the Jews who are still in Babylon to return to Jerusalem. Babylon is the "land of the north" as it invaded Israel coming from the north. *The four winds*: In effect, the exiles had been scattered to, and will return from, north, south, east and west.

(2:7) *Come... Escape...*: Practically, a repetition of v. 2:6. *O Zion*: Jerusalem's exiles still in Babylon. *Daughter of Babylon*: A personification of Babylon and its inhabitants.

(2:8-9) *Raise My hand*: Yahweh will use His power to defeat Judah's enemies. *Whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye*: The meaning is that whoever strikes against Israel, will actually hit himself (by means of Yahweh's hand).

(2:10) *Daughter of Zion*: A personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. *I will live among you*: Yahweh will be present in the Tabernacle of the rebuilt Temple.

(2:11) *Many nations will be joined...*: In fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3) that plenty of Gentiles will seek Him. *In that day*: The Day of Yahweh, a time of judgment or blessing when He will intervene decisively in the affairs of the nations. In other terms when, at the second coming of the Messiah, all men will be with Yahweh. *I [Zechariah] am living... and you know...*: Zechariah is proclaiming his status of prophet of Yahweh.

(2:12) *Yahweh will inherit...*: Among all the nations living with Him, Israel will always be Yahweh's choice. *Holy Land*: Holy because it was the site of the earthly sanctuary of Yahweh. *Will again choose Jerusalem*: As the place of His eternal presence.

(2:13) *Be still before Yahweh*: On the Day of Yahweh, all the people of the world are to be silent before Yahweh, their judge. *He has roused Himself*: To judge.

Clean garments for the High Priest (3:1-10)

(3:1) Then he [the angel] showed me Joshua the high priest standing before Yahweh's angel, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.

(3:2) Yahweh said to Satan, "I rebuke you, Satan! I, who have chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"

(3:3) Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. **(3:4)** The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes."

Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you."

(3:5) Then I [Zechariah] said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of Yahweh stood by.

(3:6) The angel of Yahweh gave this charge to Joshua: **(3:7)** "This is what Yahweh the Almighty says: 'If you will walk in My ways and keep

My requirements, then you will govern My house and have charge of My courts, and I will give you a place among these standing here [before Me].

(3:8) Listen, O high priest Joshua and your associated seated before you, who are symbols of things to come: I am going to bring My servant, the Messiah. **(3:9)** See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.

(3:10) In that day each of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree."

(3:1-10) In these verses there is the fourth of eight consecutive visions. The meaning is that Israel will be cleansed and restored as a priestly nation, wholly consecrated to Yahweh's service.

(3:1) *Joshua... standing before Yahweh's angel:* A judicial scene where Joshua, as high priest, represents the sinful nation of Israel. *Satan:* The name means "Accuser." *To accuse him [Joshua]:* As the representative of Israel.

(3:2) *I rebuke... I... rebuke:* Repeated for emphasis. *Chosen Jerusalem:* As declared in vv. 1:17 and 2:12. It is important to note that the rebuke is for Satan's activity against Jerusalem, not against Joshua. Joshua the high priest is accused and acquitted on behalf of the nation Israel. *Burning stick snatched from the fire:* Joshua -and all returned exiles- was retrieved from the fire of Babylonian exile to carry out Yahweh's purposes.

(3:3) *Dressed in filthy clothes:* Symbolic of Israel's sinful condition.

(3:4) *Those who were standing before him:* Other angels. *Take off his filthy clothes:* Symbolic of the removal of sin. *Rich garments:* Symbolic of the new, cleansed position of Israel before Yahweh.

(3:5) *A clean turban:* Symbolic of Joshua's function as high priest fully accepted by Yahweh.

(3:6-7) *If you... then you:* If Joshua and his priestly associates are faithful, they will be co-workers with the angels in the carrying out of Yahweh's purposes for Israel. *Walk in My ways:* A phrase describing the correct attitude of the priests (and ultimately of the nation) toward Yahweh. *Keep My requirements:* Referred to the faithful performance of priestly duties. *Govern My house:* Will continue to serve in the Temple. *Have charge of My courts:* Will guard the Temple from idolatry and other religious defilements. *A place among...:* Access to Yahweh comparable to that of the angels.

(3:8) *Symbolic of things to come:* Now Yahweh is speaking of future events, of the coming of His Messiah.

(3:9) *The stone:* Another figure for the Messiah. *Seven eyes:* Symbolic of being in complete control of the situation and of judging with the perfect

knowledge and justice of Yahweh. *Engrave an inscription*: To officialize his position of Messiah. *Remove the sin... in a single day*: The Messiah will atone for all the sins of the world on the day of his sacrificial death.

(3:10) *In that day each of you will...*: After the Day of Yahweh, the time of judgment when He will intervene decisively in the affairs of the nations, all people will live in peace, security and contentment.

The gold lampstand and the two olive trees (4:1-14)

(4:1) Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep. **(4:2)** He asked me, "What do you see?"

I answered, "I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights. **(4:3)** Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left."

(4:4) I asked the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?"

(4:5) He answered, "Do you not know what these are?"

"No, my lord," I replied.

(4:6) So he said to me, "This is the word of Yahweh to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.'

(4:7) What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he [Zerubbabel] will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'Yahweh bless it! Yahweh bless it!'"

(4:8) Then the word of Yahweh came to me: **(4:9)** "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this Temple; his hands will also complete it. Then you will know that Yahweh the Almighty has sent [His Spirit] to you. **(4:10)** Who despises the day of small things? Men will rejoice when they see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel."

For the seven [eyes on the stone] are the eyes of Yahweh, which range throughout the earth.

(4:11) Then I asked the angel, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?"

(4:12) Again I asked him, "What are these two olive branches [of the two olive trees] besides the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?"

(4:13) He replied, "Do you know what these are?"

"No, my lord," I said.

(4:14) So he said, "These are the two [Zerubbabel and Joshua] who are anointed to serve Yahweh, the Lord of all the earth."

(4:1-14) In these verses there is the fifth of eight consecutive visions. The meaning is that the Jews will be encouraged to rebuild the Temple by being reminded of their divine resources. The light from the lampstand in

the Tabernacle of the Temple represents the reflection of Yahweh's glory in the consecration and the priestly service of His people -made possible by His spiritual power. This power will equip and sustain Zerubbabel in the rebuilding of the Temple. And, in the performance of their offices, Zerubbabel and Joshua (as representatives of the royal and priestly mediatorial offices) will channel the spiritual power of Yahweh to His people.

(4:1) *Wakened me:* All the eight visions were given to Zechariah on the same night. Clearly, he fell asleep after the fourth vision.

(4:2) *A gold lampstand with...:* Seven lamps around a large bowl that served as a reservoir of oil, with seven channels conveying the oil from the bowl to the lamps. The bowl, an abundant supply of oil, symbolizes the fullness of Yahweh's spiritual power. The seven lamps, an abundant supply of light, symbolize Yahweh's spiritual power, given abundantly to all people.

(4:3) *Two olive trees:* They represent the royal and priestly offices and symbolize a continuing supply of oil to the bowl.

(4:4-5) *Do you know...? No...:* The answer to this question is given in v. 4:14.

(4:6) *Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit:* Yahweh's spiritual power -not earthly might (military strength) and power (human manpower)-will equip and sustain Zerubbabel (and the workers) in the rebuilding of the Temple.

(4:7) *Mountain... level ground:* Faith in Yahweh's spiritual power can overcome huge obstacles, as the enemies' opposition and the people's unwillingness to persevere. *Capstone:* The final stone to be put in place marking the completion of the reconstruction of the Temple.

(4:8-9) *Zerubbabel... laid the foundation... will also complete it:* Yahweh's assurance that, in spite of the difficulties, the reconstruction of His Temple will be completed. *Yahweh... has sent [His Spirit] to you:* Zechariah is in spiritual communion with Yahweh (In Old Testament times, the spiritual communion Yahweh-man was possible only in case of His initiative, when, in New Testament times, it is fully open to each man's initiative).

(4:10) *Day of small things:* Some people thought that the work on the Temple was without value (this Temple was to be less rich than the former one), but Yahweh's will was to have it and He Himself was an active party in the rebuilding program so that, by His spiritual power, He would enable Zerubbabel to finish it. *Plumb line:* The people will rejoice seeing Zerubbabel organize the work on the Temple. *The seven [eyes on the stone] are...:* This is the stone with seven eyes of v. 3:9. The meaning is that Yahweh oversees the whole earth and is therefore in control of the situation in Judah.

(4:11-13) *What are...? Do you know...?:* Practically, a repetition of the question asked in vv. 4:4-5, whose answer is given in v. 4:14.

(4:14) *The two... anointed:* Zerubbabel, from the royal line of David, and Joshua, from the priestly line of Aaron.

The flying scroll (5:1-4)

(5:1) I looked again -and there before me was a flying scroll!

(5:2) He [the angel] asked me, "What do you see?"

I answered, "I see a flying scroll, twenty cubits long and ten cubits wide."

(5:3) And he said to me, "This is the curse that is going out over the whole land; for according to what it says on one side, every thief will be banished, and according to what it says on the other, everyone who swears falsely will be banished. **(5:4)** Yahweh the Almighty declares, 'I will send it [the curse] out, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by My Name. It will remain in his house and destroy it, both its timbers and its stones.'"

(5:1-4) In these verses there is the sixth of eight consecutive visions. The meaning is that all lawbreakers will be condemned and that all (non repented) sinners will be banished from the community and the land.

(5:1) *Flying scroll:* Unrolled, waving in the air and spread out like a large sheet so it could be read by all on both sides.

(5:2) *Twenty... ten cubits...:* About thirty by fifteen feet. Unusually large, because of the importance of its message, for all to see.

(5:3) *The curse that...:* The people of Judah had been guilty of infractions against the middle commands of the two Tables of the Law, that is, those against stealing and swearing falsely. *Every thief... everyone who swear falsely:* These, the most common forms of lawbreaking at the time, are intended as representative of all sins.

(5:4) *It will enter... and destroy:* Yahweh's curse will free Judah of all lawbreakers; only a respectful population will satisfy Yahweh and will allow Him to keep His promises of peace and prosperity.

The woman in a basket (5:5-11)

(5:5) Then the angel who was speaking to me came forward and said to me, "Look up and see what this is that is appearing."

(5:6) I asked, "What is it?"

He replied, "It is a measuring basket." And he added, "This is the iniquity of the people throughout the land."

(5:7) Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman! **(5:8)** He said, "This is wickedness," and he pushed her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover down over its mouth.

(5:9) Then I looked up -and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings! They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between heaven and earth.

(5:10) "Where are they taking the basket?" I asked the angel who was speaking to me.

(5:11) He replied, "To the country of Shinar [Babylonia] to build a house for it. When it is ready, the basket will be set there in its place."

(5:5-11) In these verses there is the seventh of eight consecutive visions. The meaning is that not only the most persistent sinners must be removed from the community and the land, but the whole sinful system as well -to a more fitting place, represented by Babylonia.

(5:5-6) *Measuring basket:* A normal, ephah-sized (1 ephah = 22 volumetric liters) measuring container would not be large enough to hold a person. This one was undoubtedly larger (like the flying scroll of vv. 5:1-2) and was used to measure "the iniquity of the people." The use of a big measuring unit to symbolize the iniquity of Israel takes into account the common commercial sin of making false weights and measures.

(5:7-8) *Cover of lead:* To hold safely inside the content of the basket. *A woman... wickedness:* A woman is chosen to represent the wickedness of the people because, unfortunately, such was the opinion the Jews (especially the priestly cast) had of their women. The Hebrew word for wickedness denotes civil, ethical and religious evil.

(5:9) *Two women... wings... of a stork:* Surely two angels, but appearing to Zechariah in a way appropriated to the content of their basket.

(5:10-11) *Taking the basket... to... Shinar [Babylonia]:* Shinar (Babel or Babylonia) is the name of the land where the Babel Tower was built (Genesis 11:2), symbol of wickedness because site of ancient and future idolatry and of rebellion against Yahweh. The collective sin of Israel must be removed from the land where Yahweh had chosen to dwell with His people. Only after purging Israel of all its evil would the Promised Land truly be the "Holy Land" of v. 2:12. *To build a house for it:* The basket of wickedness will be placed in a temple as an idol (a pagan idol was a powerless personification of the deity).

The four chariots (6:1-8)

(6:1) I looked up again -and there before me there were four chariots coming out from [the valley] between two mountains- mountains of bronze!

(6:2) The first chariot had red horses, the second black, **(6:3)** the third white, and the fourth dappled -all of them powerful. **(6:4)** I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these, my lord?"

(6:5) The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of Yahweh, the Lord of the whole world.

(6:6) The one with the black horses is going toward the north country, the one with the white horses after them, and the one with the dappled horses toward the south."

(6:7) And the powerful horses were straining to go throughout the earth. And he [the angel] said, "Go throughout the earth!" So they went throughout the earth.

(6:8) Then he called me, "Look, those going toward the north country have given the Spirit of Yahweh's rest in the land of the north."

(6:1-8) In these verses there is the eighth and last of eight consecutive visions. It corresponds to the first (vv. 1:7-17), though there are differences in details, such as in the order of the colors of the horses. As in the first vision, Yahweh is depicted as He who controls the events of history. And, at the end, He will conquer all the nations that oppress Israel.

(6:1) *Four chariots:* Angelic spirits acting as agents of divine judgment (as explained in v. 6:5). *Two mountains... of bronze:* The chariots' place of departure is identified with two important mountains, probably Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives, with the Kidron Valley in between. Bronze seems to symbolize righteous divine judgment against sin.

(6:2-3) *Red horses... black... white... dappled:* It seems that these colors had a clear significance, so clear not to be stated. Yet, this significance eludes completely our present knowledge. Furthermore the traditional significance of these colors (Red = war and bloodshed; Black = death and famine; White = triumph and victory; Dappled = pestilence and plagues) does not seem appropriate to this case.

(6:4-5) *Four spirits of heaven...:* Yahweh's agents carrying out His divine judgment.

(6:6) *Black horses... north country:* Primarily Babylonia, but also the direction from which most of Israel's enemies had invaded Palestine. *White horses... after them:* That is, after the black horses. *Dappled horses... south:* Toward Egypt, the other traditional enemy of Israel. To note that nothing is said of the red horses.

(6:7) *Throughout the earth:* Going north and south (v. 6:6) is here synonymous of all around the earth.

(6:8) *North country... given... rest:* The angelic agents dispatched to the north had triumphed (king Darius was allowing the Jews to return to their country and to rebuild the Temple) and thus had appeased Yahweh's spirit. Furthermore, since victory is announced against the north (the most powerful enemy), victory is assured over all other enemies.

A crown for Joshua (6:9-15)

(6:9) The word of Yahweh came to me: **(6:10)** "Take silver and gold from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who have arrived from Babylon. Go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. **(6:11)** Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadak.

(6:12) Tell him this is what Yahweh the Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Messiah, and he will spring out from his place and build the Temple of Yahweh. **(6:13)** It is he who will build the Temple of Yahweh, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on His throne. And he will be a priest on His throne. And there will be harmony between the two [the Messiah and Yahweh]'.
(6:14) The crown will be given by Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Josiah son of Zephaniah, [and kept] as a memorial in the Temple of Yahweh."

(6:15) Those who are far away will come and help to build the Temple of Yahweh, and you will know that Yahweh the Almighty has sent me [Zechariah] to you. This will happen if you diligently obey Yahweh your God.

(6:9-15) The fourth (vv. 3:1-10) and fifth (vv. 4:1-14) visions were concerned with the high priest and the civil governor's separate functions. Zechariah now relates the message of those two visions to the Messianic King-Priest, who will unify for ever the two functions. Yahweh instructs Zechariah to perform a symbolic act by crowning Joshua the high priest in representation of the future Messiah, who will build the eternal Temple and will be both Priest and King.

(6:9) *The word of Yahweh came:* This formula, indicating direct prophetic revelation, assumes that the night visions had terminated.

(6:10) *Take silver and gold from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah...:* The precious metals were received from a small, otherwise unknown delegation of Jewish exiles from Babylon, to aid in the rebuilding of the Temple. *Josiah son of Zephaniah:* The delegation was visiting at the home of another otherwise unknown Jew, Josiah.

(6:11) *Make a crown:* An ornate crown with many diadems; a royal crown

for the high priest -who, as such, was usually wearing a specific turban, not a crown- symbolizing the crowning and reigning of the Messianic King-Priest. To note the symbolic meaning of the crowning of the high priest Joshua rather than the governor Zerubbabel: the crowning of Zerubbabel could have been misunderstood as the crowning of the messianic Son of David, since Zerubbabel, like the promised Messiah, was a descendant of David and a political leader.

(6:12-13) *Tell him...*: Yahweh told Zechariah to convey to Joshua that he would represent or typify the Messiah who will build the eternal Temple. *The man whose name is the Messiah*: Yahweh's Messiah will clearly be a man (not, as believed in Christian times, an incarnation of the second person of a supposed Trinity). *He will spring out from his place*: The Messiah will be born on Earth. *Build the Temple of Yahweh*: The everlasting Kingdom of Yahweh, not a physical, earthly temple. *Clothed with majesty... sit and rule... a priest on His throne*: The Messiah will hold both the royal and the priestly offices, a combination not possible in Israel. And his position will be so high that he will seat on Yahweh's throne. *There will be harmony...*: Yahweh and His Messiah will be in perfect accord, that is, in full spiritual communion.

(6:14) *The crown will...*: The crown of v. 6:11 will be deposited by the delegation in the new Temple as a reminder of Yahweh's promised Messiah.

(6:15) *Those who are far away...*: Jews will come back from far away countries to work on the rebuilding of Jerusalem Temple. *You will know...*: The making of the crown and the coming of the people for the reconstruction of the Temple will prove that Zechariah is really a prophet of Yahweh. *This will happen if...*: A reminder that the realization of Yahweh's promises is always subject to His people's obedience.

Justice and mercy, not fasting (7:1-14)

(7:1) In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Kisley. **(7:2)** The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech, together with their men, to entreat Yahweh **(7:3)** by asking the priests of the House of Yahweh the Almighty and the prophets, "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"

(7:4) Then the word of Yahweh the Almighty came to me [Zechariah]: **(7:5)** "Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for Me that you fasted? **(7:6)** And when you were eating and drinking were you not just feasting for yourselves? **(7:7)** Are these not My words proclaimed through the earlier prophets, when Jerusalem and its sur-

roundings towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?"

(7:8) And the word of Yahweh came again to Zechariah: **(7:9)** "This is what I, Yahweh the Almighty, say: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. **(7:10)** Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.'

(7:11) But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. **(7:12)** They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the Law or to the words that I, Yahweh the Almighty, had sent by My Spirit through the earlier prophets. So I, Yahweh the Almighty, was very angry.

(7:13) When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen. **(7:14)** I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate."

(7:1) *Fourth year... fourth day... ninth month...*: December 7, 518 BC, almost two years after the eight night visions. About halfway through the period of Temple rebuilding (520-516 BC).

(7:2-3) *People of Bethel... Sharezer and Regem-Melech*: A delegation that came to Jerusalem to ask whether the nation should continue to fast in remembrance of Jerusalem's destruction. The delegates were evidently Jews (in spite of their foreign names, apparently acquired in Babylon) who came from the city of Bethel, the Israelite city 12 miles north of Jerusalem that had been the center of apostate worship for the Northern 10 tribes of Israel. *Should I...*: The people of Bethel collectively. *Fast in the fifth month*: To commemorate the burning of the Temple and of other important buildings. *So many years*: The years of the exile to Babylon. The question raised by the Bethelites implies a desire to discontinue the self-imposed observance of fasting in the fifth month (July-August), which commemorated the burning to the ground of the city and the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.

(7:4-7) *Ask all the people...*: A rebuke for selfish and insincere fasting on the part of the people and the priests. *Fifth an seventh months*: The first, to commemorate the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple, the second of Gedaliah's assassination (Gedaliah had been appointed governor of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar and assassinated, probably, on October 4, 583 BC). *Was it really for Me...? just... for yourselves*: Their fasting was empty formalism because, whether they were fasting or eating, they were doing it

not for Yahweh, but for themselves. *Earlier prophets*: Such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. *When Jerusalem...*: In that time of peace and prosperity the Israelites' behavior was as at present -selfish and insincere. *Negev*: The dry wasteland stretching southward from near the bottom of the Dead Sea to the border with Egypt. *The western foothills*: Sloping from the western side of the Dead Sea toward the Mediterranean.

(7:8-10) *Justice... mercy and compassion... do not oppress... do not think evil...*: Four tests of faithful covenant living, consisting of social, moral and ethical commands. Yahweh always desired inner spiritual sincerity rather than external formalism.

(7:11-12) *They refused...*: The earlier generation, whose conduct resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile. *Would not listen...*: To what Yahweh was telling them through His prophets (who, when prophesying, were in spiritual communion with Him).

(7:13-14) *When I called...*: The previous generation had been disobedient and their disobedience brought the results listed in these verses. Zechariah had to remind the people of his days that if they would go in the opposite direction from that of their forefathers, Yahweh would return to them with a blessing instead of with a curse. *Scattered them*: One of the curses for covenant disobedience.

Yahweh promises to bless Jerusalem (8:1-23)

(8:1) Again the word of Yahweh the Almighty came to me [Zechariah].

(8:2) This is what Yahweh the Almighty says: "I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning of jealousy for her.

(8:3) I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of Yahweh the Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.

(8:4) Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with a cane in hand because of his age. **(8:5)** The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.

(8:6) It may seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, but will it seem marvelous to Me?

(8:7) I will save My people from the countries of the east and the west.

(8:8) I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be My people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.

(8:9) You, who now hear these words spoken by the prophets who were there when the foundation was laid for My house, let your hands be strong so that the Temple may be built. **(8:10)** Before that time there were no wages for men or beasts. No one could go about his business safely because of his enemy, for I had turned every man against his neighbor. **(8:11)** But

now I will not deal with the remnant of this people as I did in the past.

(8:12) The seed will grow well, the vine will yield its fruit, the ground will produce its crops, and the heavens will drop their dew. I will give all these things as an inheritance to the remnant of this people. **(8:13)** As you have been an object of cursing among the nations, O Judah and Israel, so will I save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid, but let your hands be strong.

(8:14) Just as I had determined to bring disaster upon you and showed no pity when your fathers angered Me, **(8:15)** so now I have determined to do good again to Jerusalem and Judah. Do not be afraid. **(8:16)** These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; **(8:17)** do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not swear falsely. I hate all this.

(8:18-19) The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore look for truth and peace.

(8:20) Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, **(8:21)** and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, 'Let us go at once to entreat and seek Yahweh the Almighty. I myself am going.' **(8:22)** And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek Yahweh the Almighty and to entreat Him.

(8:23) In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, 'Let us go with you, because we have heard that Yahweh is with you.'"

(8:1-23) A series of ten promises of blessing, each of them -in the original text- beginning with "This is what Yahweh the Almighty says." This chapter reflects the promised blessings pictured throughout the night visions of vv. 1:7 - 6:8.

(8:1) *The word of Yahweh... came to me:* Zechariah again identifies this message as a revelation of Yahweh.

(8:2) *Jealous:* Yahweh's jealousy concerns His people and assumes the covenant relationship as His exclusive right to possess Israel and to claim her faithfulness. This jealousy was expressed against Israel for 70 years, but His anger now turned toward the enemy nations.

(8:3) First promise. *I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem:* As already told in vv. 1:3 and 1:16, if the people of Zechariah's days would go in the opposite direction from that of their forefathers, Yahweh would return to them with a blessing instead than with a curse and will be present in the Tabernacle of the rebuilt Temple. *City of Truth:* Explained in v. 8:16.

Mountain of Yahweh... Holy Mountain: Mount Zion, on top of which the Temple was built.

(8:4-5) Second promise. *Men and women of old age... boys and girls:* Depicting the peace and safety of the Messianic era.

(8:6) Third promise. *Marvelous to the remnant... but... to Me?:* The situation of peace and security will satisfy completely those living in it, but not Yahweh, who is looking to have all people in that situation, not only a small part of them.

(8:7-8) Fourth promise. *I will save My people...:* Delivering them from exile, bondage and dispersion. Once again Yahweh promises to reunite Israel and Judah in the future. *They will be My people, and I will be...:* Covenant terminology, pertaining to intimate fellowship.

(8:9) Fifth promise. *Prophets who were there when...:* Haggai and Zechariah, who came back from exile with the first group of 50,000 people and who saw the work on the new foundation.

(8:10) *Before that time:* Before the Temple foundation was laid the whole area was dangerous. *No wages... no one could go about... for I...:* Because they were under Yahweh's curse for their disobedience.

(8:11) *But now...:* The reasons for discouragement have passed; in the following verses Yahweh will provide the grounds for encouragement.

(8:12) Sixth promise. *The seed will grow... I will give...:* Fertility and abundance are part of the covenant blessings for obedience.

(8:13) *Object of cursing among the nations:* Defeat and conquest by foreign nations are part of the covenant curses for disobedience. *Judah and Israel... I will save you:* The whole nation (divided so long before in the kingdoms of the north and the south) will experience this deliverance and blessing. *Let your hands be strong:* To complete the rebuilding of the Temple.

(8:14-17) Seventh promise and a specification of Yahweh's part in the people's restoration to His favor and blessing, followed by their part.

(8:14) *Just as I... when your fathers:* Yahweh had been very angry with the preexilic Jews because of their covenant-breaking sins.

(8:15) *So now I... to do good:* As already told in v. 8:3, if the people of Zechariah's days would go in the opposite direction from that of their fathers, Yahweh would return to them with a blessing instead than with a curse.

(8:16-17) *These are the things...:* Such moral and ethical behavior sums up the character of those who are in covenant relationship with Yahweh. Truth, justice, mercy and honesty should characterize them in both personal and civil spheres.

(8:18-19) Eighth promise. *Fourth:* The fast that lamented the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. *Fifth:* Commemorated the bur-

ning of the Temple and the other important buildings. *Seventh*: Marked the anniversary of Gedaliah's assassination. (Gedaliah had been appointed governor of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar and assassinated, probably, on October 4, 583 BC). *Tenth*: Mourned the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem. These fasts were all self-imposed and had been observed for 70 years with sorrowful hearts and misdirected motives (see vv. 7:5-7). *Will become... happy festivals*: Because the people will have to rejoice and give thanks for the deliverance and blessing of the whole nation. Again the people in Zechariah's days were encouraged by their future hope to cherish what Yahweh cherishes, in this case, truth and peace.

(8:20-23) An overall prediction about the Gentiles seeking Yahweh.

(8:20-22) Ninth promise. *Many peoples and... will... seek Yahweh*: Usually, in the Old Testament, the Gentiles are depicted as enemies of Jerusalem -enemies to be destroyed by the wrath of Yahweh. Here, it is one of the few times they are depicted as possible friends -friends who will actually be accepted by Yahweh.

(8:23) Tenth promise. *Ten men... one Jew*: One way to indicate a large number in Hebrew. *We have heard that Yahweh is with you*: A man's true godliness attracts others to Yahweh. In the future days of blessing, peoples of the whole earth will join with the Jews in their relationship with Yahweh.

The judgment on Israel's enemies (9:1-8)

An oracle

(9:1) The word of Yahweh is against the land of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus -for the eye of Yahweh is on all men and on all the tribes of Israel- **(9:2)** and upon Hamath too, which borders on it [Damascus], and upon Tyre and Sidon, though they are very skillful.

(9:3) Tyre has built herself [as] a stronghold; she has heaped up silver like dust, and gold like the dirt of the streets. **(9:4)** But Yahweh will take away her possessions and destroy her power on the sea, and she will be consumed by fire.

(9:5) Ashkelon will see it and fear; Gaza will writhe in agony, and Ekron too, for her hope will wither. Gaza will lose her king and Ashkelon will be deserted. **(9:6)** Foreigners will occupy Ashdod, and Yahweh will cut off the pride of the Philistines.

(9:7) Yahweh will take the blood from their mouths, the forbidden food from between their teeth. Those who are left will belong to Yahweh our God and become leaders in Judah, and Ekron will be like the Jebusites.

(9:8) And Yahweh will defend His house against marauding forces. Ne-

ver again will an oppressor overrun His people, for now He is keeping watch.

(9:1-8) A prophetic description of Yahweh's intervention in the area south to Jerusalem, destroying the traditional enemies of Israel. As history shows, the agent of judgment was Alexander the Great with his conquests throughout the area of Palestine after the battle of Issus in 333 BC. [Zechariah, living in the days of the Medio-Persian Empire predicted the coming of the Grecian Empire (vv. 9:1-8,13), the Roman Empire (vv. 11:4-14), and Israel's future in the last days (chaps. 12-14)].

(9:1) *The word of Yahweh is against...*: Yahweh has decreed against Hadrach; and the due, physical action will follow at the due time, implemented by what or who Yahweh has decided to be His -usually unaware- agent. *Hadrach*: Hatarikka, a city and a country lying north of Hamath on the Orontes River, mentioned in Assyrian cuneiform inscriptions. *Damascus*: The leading city-state of the Arameans (Syrians). *The eye of Yahweh is on all*: Words which should inspire the sacred awe of all men because of the divine judgment brought on their cities.

(9:2) *Hamath*: An Aramean (Syrian) city north of Damascus on the Oronte River, the modern Hama. *Tyre and Sidon*: Phoenician (modern Lebanese) coastal cities. *Though they are very skillful*: Yahweh's judgment will fall on them even if they had build defenses and fortifications.

(9:3-4) *Tyre... stronghold*: Tyre was a stronghold, an island fortress, which had withstood a 5-year siege by the Assyrians under Shalmaneser V and, years later, a 13-year siege by the Babylonian army of Nebuchadnezzar. Her destruction by Alexander the Great's brief 5-month siege is ascribed to Yahweh ultimate action. *Silver like dust... gold like dirt*: Tyre was a center of trade and commerce, and her wealth was proverbial. *But Yahweh will...*: Tyre fell to Alexander the Great in 332 BC.

(9:5-6) *Ashkelon... Gaza... Ekron... Ashod*: Four of the principal Philistine cities (Gath is omitted), which were greatly alarmed by Alexander's steady advance and are next on the judgment march. *Foreigners will occupy...*: After Alexander's conquest people of mixed nationality would live in that area, a situation characteristic of the postexilic period. *Pride of the Philistines*: At one time their control of Canaan was so extensive that the land was eventually named after them ("Palestine").

(9:7) *The blood*: Of idolatrous sacrifices. *The forbidden food*: Ceremonially unclean food. *Those who are left... Ekron will be like the Jebusite*: The remnant of the Philistines will be removed from idolatry to belong to Yahweh and will be absorbed in Judah as it had happened to the ancient inha-

bitants of Jerusalem, the Jebusites, at the time of the conquest of Canaan. Anyway, to note that there is no evidence that this was fulfilled as a consequence of the invasion of Alexander.

(9:8) *Defend His House against marauding forces:* In effect, Alexander spared the Temple and the city of Jerusalem, never laying siege on it. *Never again will...:* As usual, Yahweh's promise of protection is subordinate to the the Jews' keeping of faithfulness.

The coming of Zion's King (9:9-13)

(9:9) Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your King comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

(9:10) Yahweh will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He [your King] will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

(9:11) As for you [Israel], because of the blood of Yahweh's covenant with you, He [your King] will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

(9:12) Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now Yahweh announces that He will restore twice as much to you. **(9:13)** He will bend Judah as He bends His bow and fill it with Ephraim. Yahweh will rouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and make you like a warrior's sword.

(9:9) *Rejoice...:* A verse quoted in the New Testament (Mt 21:5; Jn 12:15) as Messianic and referring to the Triumphal Entry of Jesus the Messiah into Jerusalem. *Daughter of Zion... of Jerusalem:* A personification of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. *Your king:* The Davidic Messianic King. *Righteous:* Conforming to the divine standard of morality and ethics. *Having salvation:* This phrase denotes that the Messiah will come as the Deliverer, as the One who gives salvation to all people. *Gentle:* Or "humble." *Riding on a donkey...:* A suitable choice, since the donkey was an animal of peace as well as a princely mount, in contrast to the horse, which was used for war purposes. Like some other Old Testament prophecies, this one blends two events into one perspective -event that the New Testament divides into two distinct ad-vents of the Messiah separated by the present Church Age.

(9:10) *Yahweh will take away... He will proclaim...:* An era of disarmament brought by Yahweh and by His Messiah operating as one will. *Peace to the nations:* In sharp contrast to Alexander's Empire, which was founded on bloodshed, the Messianic King will establish a Universal Kingdom of

peace as the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. *His rule... from... to:* It will be universal. *The River:* The Euphrates.

(9:11) *The blood of Yahweh's covenant:* The blood Yahweh's Messiah will shed to open a New Pact of Universal Salvation. *He will free...:* Prophetic of Jesus Christ's descent to Hades (*the waterless pit:* an empty cistern used for a dungeon) to preach to the souls of the dead (*prisoners*) followed, at his resurrection, by his ascent to heaven accompanied by all the souls who had believed to his preaching.

(9:12) *Your fortress:* Jerusalem. *Prisoners of hope:* The exiles in Babylon were called prisoners of hope because they had Yahweh's promise of being regathered in Jerusalem. *Restore twice as much:* Indicative of full restoration. Yahweh's blessings at the end of time will far exceed anything Israel has ever known.

(9:13) *He will bend...:* Yahweh is compared to a warrior who uses Judah (the Southern Kingdom) as his bow and Ephraim (the representative of the 10 tribes of the Northern Kingdom) as his arrow. *Yahweh will rouse your sons, O Zion:* Prophetic of the guerrilla uprising under the leadership of the Maccabees in 166 BC. *Your sons, O Greece:* The Seleucids of Syria (after the breaking up of Alexander's Empire).

Yahweh will appear (9:14-17)

(9:14) Then Yahweh will appear over them; His arrow will flash like lightning. Yahweh the Sovereign will sound the trumpet and He will march in the storms of the south.

(9:15) He will shield them and they will destroy and overcome with sling-stones. They will drink [the blood] and roar as with wine; they will be full like bowls used for sprinkling the corners of the altar.

(9:16) Yahweh their God on that Day will save as a flock His people. They will sparkle in His land like jewels in a crown.

(9:17) How attractive and beautiful they will be! Grain will make the young men thrive, and new wine the young women.

(9:14) *Yahweh... over them:* Giving protection to His people. *His arrow...:* A poetic image, of a fearsome manifestation of Yahweh empowering Israel for victory over her enemies.

(9:15) *He will shield them and they will destroy...:* Again, prophetic of the guerrilla uprising under the leadership of the Maccabees in 166 BC, when Yahweh's help will give them the victory in spite of them being few and poorly armed (*slingstones*). *Bowls used for sprinkling...:* Used to catch the blood of the animals slain besides the altar and to sprinkle it at the base.

(9:16-17) *On that day:* The Day of Yahweh, a time of judgment or blessing when He will intervene decisively in the affairs of the nations. *They will sparkle... like jewels in a crown:* A poetic image, of the promises that will be fulfilled concerning His people in his land. *Attractive and beautiful:* Divine blessing on people and nature will produce conditions of plenty, so that physical health will also be assured. *Grain... wine...:* A poetic image, typically oriental.

Yahweh will care for Judah (10:1-12)

(10:1) Ask Yahweh for rain in the springtime; it is Yahweh who makes the storm clouds. He gives showers of rain to men, and plants of the field to everyone.

(10:2) The idols speak deceit, diviners see visions that lie; they tell dreams that are false, they give comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep oppressed for lack of a shepherd.

(10:3) "My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders [of Israel]; for I, Yahweh the Almighty, will care for My flock, the house of Judah, and make them like a proud battle horse.

(10:4) From Judah will come the cornerstone, from him the tent peg, from him the battle bow, from him every ruler.

(10:5) Together they will be like mighty men trampling the muddy streets in battle. Because I am with them, they will fight and overthrow the horsemen.

(10:6) I will strengthen the house of Judah and save the house of Joseph. I will restore them because I have compassion on them. They will be as though I had not rejected them, for I am Yahweh their God and I will answer them.

(10:7) The Ephraimites will become like mighty men, and their hearts will be glad as with wine. Their children will see it and be joyful; their hearts will rejoice in Yahweh.

(10:8) I will whistle to them and gather them in. Surely I will redeem them; they will be as numerous as before.

(10:9) Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember Me. They and their children will survive, and they will return.

(10:10) I will bring them back from Egypt and gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there will be no room enough for them.

(10:11) They will pass through the sea of trouble; the surging sea will be subdued and all the depths of the Nile will dry up. Assyria's pride will be

brought down and Egypt's scepter will pass away.

(10:12) I will strengthen them in Myself and in My Name they will walk," declares Yahweh.

(10:1) *Ask Yahweh for...*: Yahweh, not the Canaanite god Baal, is the one who controls the weather and the rain, giving life and fertility to the land. Therefore, Yahweh's people are to pray to and trust in Him.

(10:2) *Idols*: The household gods, which were used in Israel for divination (prediction of the future) during the period of the Judges. *Diviners*: Included among the false prophets. Resorting to them for information and guidance is against Yahweh's will because He provides true prophets for everything His people have to know. *Wander like sheep...*: Spiritual leadership is missing.

(10:3) *I will punish the leaders*: Who, instead of caring for their people, were only interested in themselves and in their riches. *Like a proud horse*: Triumphant.

(10:4) *From Judah will come the cornerstone*: Yahweh's Messiah will be one of His people. *Tent peg... battle bow... every ruler*: Meaning all the support, all the strength and all the leadership they need.

(10:5) *Together they... I am with them*: Yahweh will not do all the fighting but will empower His people to win. In effect, when they are faithful, they always win because Yahweh is with them. *Overthrow the horsemen*: Again, prophetic of the guerrilla uprising under the leadership of the Maccabees in 166 BC.

(10:6) *Judah... Joseph*: The peoples of the Northern and the Southern Kingdoms will be reunited and the whole nation (divided so long before in the two kingdoms) will experience Yahweh's deliverance and blessing. (Joseph was the father of two major Northern tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh).

(10:7) *The Ephraimites*: The name of the northern tribe of Ephraim was often used for the Northern Kingdom. *They will... Their children will...*: After their reunion the Israelites will be glad and joyful and will rejoice because of Yahweh's blessing on them.

(10:8) *Signal...gather them*: A continuation of the shepherd metaphor of v. 10:2. *Redeem... as numerous as before*: Not only the faithful remnant, but the whole population.

(10:9) *Though I... they will remember Me*: Yahweh always remembers His initial covenant and promises (but His people are prone not to).

(10:10) *Back from Egypt... Assyria*: Representative, as the more significant, of all the countries where the Israelites were dispersed. *Bring them to*: Their country is identified by the indication of the northern and eastern

extent (*Gilead and Lebanon*) of Israel's occupancy of the land promised to Abraham. *Not room enough*: Indicative of a huge population.

(10:11) *They will pass through...*: As at the crossing of the Red Sea, nothing and nobody will stop them from reuniting. Again Assyria and Egypt are mentioned to represent Israel's enemies.

(10:12) *I will strengthen them*: A final confirmation of Yahweh supporting and helping His people.

The future wrath (11:1-3)

(11:1) Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars!

(11:2) Wail, O pine tree, for the cedar has fallen; the stately trees are ruined! Wail, oaks of Bashan; the dense forest has been cut down!

(11:3) Listen to the wail of the shepherds; their rich pastures are destroyed! Listen to the roar of the lions; the lush thicket of the Jordan is ruined!

(11:1-3) *Lebanon... cedars. Pine tree. Oaks of Bashan. Rich pastures*: A description of the future devastation of the entire land of Israel from north to south, including of course its inhabitants, due to the rejection of the Messianic Good Shepherd. Everything that made rich the country and its people will be destroyed. *Bashan*: The Israelites took this region from the Amorite king, Og, at the time of the conquest of Canaan. *Shepherds... lions... lush thicket*: The shepherds would wail because their pastures would be devastated. Even the lions, who lived in the thick woods around the Jordan River would roar because of the destruction of their living areas.

The good and the bad shepherd (11:4-17)

(11:4) This is what Yahweh, my God said [to me]: "Pasture the flock marked for slaughter. **(11:5)** Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, 'Praise Yahweh, I am rich!' Their own shepherds do not spare them. **(11:6)** For I will no longer have pity on the people of the land. I will hand everyone over to his neighbor and his king. They [their shepherds] will oppress the land, and I will not rescue them [the people of the land] from their hands."

(11:7) So I [Zechariah] went to pasture the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the most oppressed of the flock. And I took two staves and called one Favor and the other Union, and I pastured the flock. **(11:8)** In one month I got rid of the three shepherds.

But the flock detested me, and I grew weary of them **(11:9)** and said, "I

will not be your shepherd. Let the dying [sheep] die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another's flesh."

(11:10) Then I took my staff called Favor and broke it, revoking the covenant Yahweh had made with all the nations. **(11:11)** It was revoked on that day, and so the most afflicted [sheep] of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of Yahweh.

(11:12) I told them, "If you think best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it." So they [the owners-sellers] paid me thirty sickles of silver.

(11:13) And Yahweh said to me, "Throw it for the potter" -the handsome price at which they priced Me! So I took the thirty sickles of silver and threw them into the House of Yahweh for the potter.

(11:14) Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.

(11:15) Then Yahweh said to me, "Take now the equipment of a foolish shepherd. **(11:16)** For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost [sheep], or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs."

(11:17) Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded!

(11:4-17) In these verses is given the reason for the judgment of Israel pronounced in vv. 11:1-3, that is, the people's rejection of the Messianic Shepherd-King. In vv. 11:4-14 Yahweh makes Zechariah describe the characteristics of the true Messiah. Then, in vv. 11:15-17, those of the bad shepherd.

(11:4) *Yahweh... says:* To Zechariah who, in this chapter, is representing the Messianic Shepherd-King. *Flock...* The people of Israel who will be punished for their unfaithfulness and slaughtered by the Romans.

(11:5) *Their buyers:* After their military defeats the Jews will be sold as slaves and bought by outsiders. *Those who sell them... Their own shepherds...:* The leaders of Israel will side with the conquerors and do nothing to spare that terrible fate to their countrymen.

(11:6) *For I will no longer...:* Practically, a repetition of v. 11:4; Yahweh will punish and abandon His people. *Land:* Palestine.

(11:7) *So I went to...:* Zechariah, in representation of the Messianic Shepherd-King. *The most oppressed of the flock:* The faithful few. *Two staffs:* Like any good shepherd, Zechariah took two staffs to use in directing and protecting the flock. *Called one Favor:* To ask divine protection on the

flock. *The other Union*: To ask for the unity of the flock, which would actually become possible only after the coming of Yahweh's Messiah.

(11:8) *I...got rid of the three shepherds*: The shepherds represent the three kinds of Jewish leaders: the prophets, the priests, and the civil magistrates -all of them inadequate. The meaning is that the Good Shepherd -the Messiah- will dispose of all unfit leaders. *The flock detested me and I grew weary of them*: Yahweh's Messiah will be rejected by His people, and Yahweh will abandon them.

(11:9) *Let... Let...*: Not only the Jews will be abandoned to their enemies, but also to the deadly fighting between their different factions.

(11:10) *Staff... Favor... broke it, revoking the covenant*: As indicated by its given name, this staff was representative of Yahweh's promise to protect His people from their enemies (but only when and if they were faithful to Him).

(11:11) *The most afflicted [sheep] of the flock*: In all of their history, there always was a remnant of few faithful Jews, who respected Yahweh's pact, even in the most terrible moments.

(11:12) *Give me my pay*: For the protective work done until then. *If not, keep it*: A more emphatic way of ending the relation of protection-work. *Thirty pieces of silver*: The compensation price for a slave gored by an ox in ancient times (Exodus 21:32). Here, a way of indicating a trifling amount, the exact one that the unfaithful shepherds of Israel will pay for the betrayal of Yahweh's Messiah.

(11:13) *Handsome price*: Ironic and sarcastic. *Threw them into the House of Yahweh for the potter*: A prophecy of what Judas and the chief priests of the Temple would do (Judas would throw the thirty coins into the Temple; the chief priests would use the money to buy the potter's field).

(11:14) *Broke my second staff called Union*: As indicated by its given name, this staff was representative of Yahweh's intention of keeping as one nation all His chosen people. The dissolution of the unity with the south-north split (Judah and Israel) and the further breaking up into parties hostile to each other was characteristic of later Jewish history.

(11:15) *Take now the equipment...*: Zechariah, not any more in representation of the Messianic Shepherd-King (now removed from the scene), now represents the selfish, corrupt leaders that will afflict the people of Israel.

(11:16) *A shepherd... who will not...*: Not only one, but more leaders as Simeon bar Kokhba (who led the Jewish revolt against the Romans in AD 132-135 and who was hailed as the promised Messiah by Rabbi Akiba). *Tearing off their hoofs*: Representative of the greedy search for even the last valuable bit of wealth.

(11:17) *Woe to the worthless shepherd...*: A clear form of curse, expressed in typical highly figurative Oriental form, where the arm indicates strength and the eye intelligence.

Jerusalem's enemies to be destroyed (12:1-9)

An oracle

(12:1) This is the word of Yahweh concerning Israel. Yahweh, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares: **(12:2)** "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. **(12:3)** On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves. **(12:4)** On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness. I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations. **(12:5)** Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong, because Yahweh the Almighty is their God.'

(12:6) On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.

(12:7) I will save the dwelling of Judah first, so that the honor of the house of David and Jerusalem's inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah. **(12:8)** On that day I will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be strong like My Angel who is going before them. **(12:9)** On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem."

(12:1-14:21) This second oracle, going till the end of the book, revolves around two scenes: the final siege of Jerusalem, and the Messiah's return to defeat Israel's enemies and establish his Kingdom.

(12:1) *The word of Yahweh concerning Israel*: Even if only Judah and Jerusalem will be mentioned, the prophecy speaks of Yahweh's decisions for the whole nation, not just for the Northern Kingdom. *Yahweh, who stretches... lays... forms*: This description of Yahweh's creative power shows that He is able to perform what He predicts; it also strengthens the royal and sovereign authority of the message.

(12:2) *Make Jerusalem a cup that...*: Figurative, a common poetic phrase describing divine judgment. The image is that of a cup full of Yahweh's

wrath, no longer turned against Israel, but rather against his enemies.

(12:3) *On that day, when all the nations... gathered against her:* The Day of Yahweh, a time of judgment when He will intervene decisively defending His people against all their enemies. *Jerusalem an immovable rock:* The defeat of Israel's enemies is likened to a man who tries to move a rock too heavy for him. Those who attack Jerusalem will do so to their own ruin.

(12:4) *I will strike... with panic... madness... blind:* A traditional, pictorial way to curse Israel's enemies.

(12:5) *Then the leaders of Judah will say...:* At least partially ironic, as for so many times the Jews had followed Yahweh only when He was showing His power.

(12:6) *I will make the leaders of Judah like...:* Their fighting power will come exclusively from Yahweh.

(12:7) *I will save... Judah first...:* Jerusalem's people were considering themselves more important for having the Temple and hosting the kings of Davidic descent. The priority given to Judah's deliverance over that of Jerusalem will assure the entire nation's unity with the inhabitants of the capital city.

(12:8) *On that day...:* The Day of Yahweh, a time of judgment when He will intervene in the affairs of His people, defeating definitely the enemy nations. *The feeblest... will be like... the house of David will be strong like...:* Yahweh will protect Jerusalem and give divine strength to all its inhabitants. Even the most feeble will be a great warrior, and the leaders of the city (*the house of David*) will be granted superhuman strength.

(12:9) *On that day:* This verse is a concluding summary regarding the defeat of the nations gathered against Jerusalem.

Mourning for the One they pierced (12:10-14)

(12:10) "And I [Yahweh] will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look to Him, the One they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for Him as one grieves for a firstborn son. **(12:11)** On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. **(12:12)** The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, **(12:13)** the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, **(12:14)** and all the rest of the clans and their wives."

(12:10) *I [Yahweh] will pour out... a spirit of...:* On the Last Day, Yahweh will send again to the Jews His Messiah (*the One they have pierced*) and all of them will understand and recognize the mistake done by their ancestors by killing him. *On the house of David and the inhabitants of...:* Both on the leaders and the commoners, thus excluding no Israelites.

(12:11) *Hadad Rimmon:* The name of a place near Megiddo, where the people mourned the death of king Josiah, the last hope of the fading Judean nation, slain by Pharaoh Neco II in 609 BC (2 Kings 23:29,33-35).

(12:12-14) *The land will mourn:* These verses picture the universality and intensity of the nation's future mourning. *Each clan by itself:* Representative of the lack of unity among the Israelites. *Nathan:* David's son. *Shimei:* Son of Gerson, the son of Levi. The first to show repentance and mourning will be, then, Israel's royal and religious leaders.

Cleansing from sin (13:1-6)

(13:1) "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

(13:2) I [Yahweh] will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more. I will remove both the [false] prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. **(13:3)** And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in Yahweh's name.' And, when he prophesies, his own parents will stab him.

(13:4) Every [false] prophet will be ashamed of his prophetic visions. He will not put on a prophet's garment of hair in order to deceive. **(13:5)** He will say, 'I am not a prophet, I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.' **(13:6)** If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'"

(13:1) *On that day:* The Last Day, the Day of Yahweh, a time of judgment when He will intervene in the affairs of His people, defeating definitely the enemy nations. *A fountain... to cleanse...:* Figurative for the spiritual salvation brought by Yahweh's Messiah and offered to all the people of the earth, giving them the possibility to repent of their sins and to be, then, accepted by Yahweh. *To the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem:* To indicate all the people of the nation.

(13:2) *The names of the idols:* At that time, to cancel the name of a person or spirit (behind each idol there was a fallen angel, a demon) meant to cancel not only his influence and fame, but even his very existence. *The [fal-*

se] prophets and the spirit of impurity: False prophecy was an ever present problem in the life of Yahweh's people.

(13:3) *And if anyone... his father and mother... will...:* The eradication of spiritual impurity supersedes even the closest family relations.

(13:4-6) *Every [false] prophet will be ashamed...:* Because of the stern measures just mentioned, a false prophet will be reluctant to identify himself as such, will be evasive in his responses to interrogation, will not wear his characteristic garment and will claim to be something else (a farmer).

Wounds on your body: The wounds self-inflicted to arouse prophetic ecstasy in idolatrous rites.

The shepherd struck, the sheep scattered (13:7-9)

(13:7) "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, against the man who is close to Me! Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn My hand against the little ones.

(13:8) In the whole land, two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. **(13:9)** This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on My Name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' and they will say, 'Yahweh is our God.'"

(13:7) *Awake, O sword, against My shepherd:* A personified object, that represents any instrument causing death. In effect, during his crucifixion, the Messiah (Jesus) will be struck with a spear. *The man who is close to Me:* Here Yahweh is claiming closeness of nature -and of spiritual communion- with His Shepherd, that is, His Messiah. The Messiah, a man, will be the human-divine son of Yahweh. *Strike... and the sheep will be scattered:* In effect, his disciples and followers will abandon Jesus like scattered sheep. *I will turn My hand against the little ones:* As a consequence of the killing of His Messiah, Yahweh will allow the Romans to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 DC.

(13:8) *Two thirds... one third...:* As in other occasions, only a small part (a "remnant") of Yahweh's people will be left for future repentance and readmission.

(13:9) *I will bring... refine... test:* A refining process for Israel. *They will call... are My people... Yahweh is our God:* After proper repentance (purification) they will be restored to proper covenant relationship with Yahweh. This last verse make us understand that the Jewish religion, in small-scale, will survive till the Day of Yahweh, at the end of time.

Yahweh comes and reigns (14:1-21)

(14:1) The day of Yahweh's [judgment] is coming, when [the booty of your] plunder will be divided in your midst.

(14:2) Yahweh will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.

(14:3) Then Yahweh will go out and fight against those nations, as He fights in a day of battle. **(14:4)** On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. **(14:5)** You will flee by the mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then Yahweh my God will come and all the holy ones with Him.

(14:6) On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost. **(14:7)** It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime -a day known [only] to Yahweh. When evening comes, there will be light.

(14:8) On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter.

(14:9) Yahweh will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be only Yahweh, and His Name the only Name.

(14:10) The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become [a plain] like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepress. **(14:11)** Jerusalem will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. It will be secure.

(14:12) This is the plague with which Yahweh will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. **(14:13)** On that day men will be stricken by Yahweh with great panic. Each man will seize the hand of another, and they will attack each other. **(14:14)** Judah too will fight at Jerusalem. The wealth of all the surrounding nations will be collected -great quantities of gold and silver and clothing. **(14:15)** A similar plague will strike the horses and mules, the camels and donkeys, and all the animals in those camps.

(14:16) Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, Yahweh the Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of the Tabernacles. **(14:17)** If any of the peoples

of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, Yahweh the Almighty, they will have no rain. **(14:18)** If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. Yahweh will bring on them the plague He inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of the Tabernacles. **(14:19)** This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of the Tabernacles.

(14:20) On that day HOLY TO YAHWEH will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in Yahweh's House will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. **(14:21)** Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to Yahweh the Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the House of Yahweh the Almighty.

(14:1-21) This chapter pictures the triumphant Second Coming of Yahweh's Messiah, returning as the divine King on the throne of David. The chapter progresses from the initial plundering of Jerusalem near the end of the future tribulation, through the catastrophic judgment on the Gentile armies at the Messiah's Second Coming and the establishment of his Eternal Reign, to a description of Yahweh's worship in Jerusalem.

(14:1) *Plundered... divided in your midst:* As explained in the following verses, Jerusalem will be plundered and the conquering Gentile armies will take and divide the plunder within the city itself.

(14:2) *Yahweh will...:* This verse announces the sack of Jerusalem in the Day of Yahweh, a theme occurring many times in the Old Testament. The punishment to Jerusalem will be Yahweh's initiative. *Half... into exile. The rest... will not:* The remaining will be saved by Yahweh (v. 14:3).

(14:3) *Then Yahweh...:* As the punishment, so the rescue will be Yahweh's initiative. *As He fights...:* In any occasion when Yahweh intervenes supernaturally to deliver His people, such as at the Red Sea crossing (Exodus Chp. 14).

(14:4) *His feet will...:* A pictorial representation of Yahweh's power. *Mount of Olives will be split...:* The direct intervention of Yahweh -actually an earthquake- will form a new, great valley.

(14:5) *You will flee:* The inhabitants left in Jerusalem will flee through this valley because of the earthquake. *Earthquake in the days of Uzziah:* Mentioned in Amos 1:1 and due to the divine judgment on Uzziah for his intrusion in the Temple with the pretense to assume priestly functions (2 Chronicles 26:16). *Azel:* The name of an unknown location eastward from Jeru-

salem. *The holy ones*: When Yahweh comes, He will be accompanied by both the believers and His angels.

(14:6-7) *That day... a unique day... Evening... light*: All due to the cosmic changes caused by Yahweh.

(14:8) *Living water...*: After Yahweh's final victory, the possibility to be in spiritual communion with Yahweh, His Messiah and everybody else will be offered to all (*eastern and western*) always (*summer and winter*).

(14:9) *Yahweh will be...*: After His final victory, there will be no more Satan, idols nor demons.

(14:10) *The whole land... will become like...*: On the Day of Yahweh the whole land around Jerusalem will be miraculously leveled to a broad valley. *The Arabah*: The low plain stretching from below Mount Hermon down the Jordan River and the Dead Sea on to the Gulf of Aqabah. This new valley will make Jerusalem more prominent. *Jerusalem will be raised up...*: Jerusalem's elevation will be both physical and in prominence. *From the Benjamin Gate to...*: All those names identify Jerusalem's boundaries.

(14:11) *Jerusalem will...*: With Yahweh "a wall of fire around it" as promised in v. 2:5.

(14:12-13) *This is the plague...*: The standard prophetic phraseology when Yahweh is fighting to defend His people.

(14:14) *Judah too...*: Judah and Jerusalem, as already seen in v. 12:2, will fight together. *Gold and silver and clothing*: The plunder of battle taken from the Gentile armies, thus reversing the situation of v. 14:1.

(14:15) *A similar plague...*: The plague of v. 14:12 will strike also the beast of burden, preventing Israel's enemies from using them to escape.

(14:16) *Then the survivors...*: A clear indication that, after the last battle on the Last Day, all the peoples of the earth will worship only Yahweh and His Messiah.

(14:17-19) *If any of the peoples...*: Useless recommendations after the Last Day, understandable only taking into account that a prophet of that time could not come to believe in a world totally devoted to Yahweh.

(14:20-21) *On that day...*: Yahweh's original purpose -for the whole humankind, not only for Israel- will be finally realized. *Holy to Yahweh... on the bells*: These words, engraved on the gold plate worn on the high priest's turban, now come to symbolize holiness in public life. *Cooking pots... Every pot...*: Even common things become holy when they are used for Yahweh's service. *Canaanite*: In the Old Testament the term Canaanite had become symbolic of anything ceremonially unclean and ungodly. Now, after the Day of Yahweh, there will be no more morally or spiritually unfit people.

The Book of Ezra, a prophet of Yahweh

Author

Though Ezra is not referred to in the book as having written it, he clearly is its author as he refers to himself in the first person (vv. 7:27-9:15). Ezra was a priest and a scribe of the Law who clearly had had documents at his disposal for the historical sections of this book (chs. 1-6).

Some sections in the Book of Ezra are written in the first-person as extracts from his memoirs (vv. 7:27-28, 8:1-34; ch. 9). Other sections are written in the third person (vv. 7:1-26; ch. 10). This is only due to the literary style of the time.

Dates

The Book of Ezra covers two distinct periods of time. Chapters 1-6 cover the 22 years from the edict of Cyrus (538 BC) to the completion of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem (516 BC). Chapters 7-10 deal with the events after Ezra's return from Babylon (458 BC). There are two exceptions to that: First, v. 4:6, which refers to an event in the reign of Xerxes (485-465 BC). Second, vv. 4:7-23, which include a letter written later during the reign of Artaxerxes (465-424 BC).

Historical setting

The setting of the book is the post-exilic era when the faithful Israelites were returning from Babylon to Judah to reestablish their Temple worship. The people returning to Jerusalem were publicly acknowledging that they believed that Yahweh, after the rebuilding of His temple in Jerusalem, would fully reestablish their nation.

There were three returns from Babylon to the land of Israel (in 537, 458 and 445 BC), just as there had been three deportations from Israel to Babylon (in 605, 597 and 586 BC). The first return was led by Zerubbabel in 537 BC. The rebuilding of the Temple was of vital importance for this group. The second return was under Ezra in 458 BC. At that time the people needed reforming; they needed to return to their covenant obligations. The third return was led by Nehemiah in 445 BC. Nehemiah's concerns were to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and, as in Ezra's time, to lead the people back to obedience to Yahweh.

The text

Nearly a fourth of the Book of Ezra was written in Aramaic. The rest was written in Hebrew. The Aramaic sections (vv. 4:8-6:18 and 7:12-26) were mainly copied from official correspondence for which the Aramaic was the standard language of the day.

Purpose

The book of Ezra, which at first sight seems to be a record of historical facts in the history of Israel during the Jews' return to their land, has a deep theological purpose addressed to its original readers, the exiles who had returned with Zerubbabel and Ezra, and who were then wavering in their relationship to Yahweh. Ezra wrote to encourage them to be involved in true Temple worship and to remind them to fulfill their covenant obligations to Yahweh.

The Book of Ezra**Cyrus helps the exiles to return (1:1-11)**

(1:1) In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of Yahweh spoken by Jeremiah, Yahweh moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:

(1:2) This is what Cyrus king of Persia says:
"Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build a temple for Him at Jerusalem in Judah.
(1:3) Anyone of His people among you -may Yahweh be with him-, let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the Temple of Yahweh, the God of Israel, the God Who is in Jerusalem. **(1:4)** And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem."

(1:5) Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites -everyone whose heart Yahweh had moved- prepared to go up and build the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem. **(1:6)** All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings. **(1:7)** Moreover, king Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the Temple of Yahweh, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god. **(1:8)** Cyrus king of Persia had them brought by Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar [Zerubbabel] the prince of Judah.

(1:9) This was the inventory:
Gold dishes: 30; silver dishes: 1,000; silver pans: 29; **(1:10)** gold bowls: 30; matching silver bowls: 410; other articles: 1,000.

(1:11) In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver. Sheshbazzar [Zerubbabel] brought all these along when the exiles came up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

(1:1) *First year:* Of the reign of Cyrus over Babylon, beginning in March, 538 BC (He had captured Babylon in October, 539). Cyrus, the founder of the Persian Empire, reigned over the Persians from 559 until 530 BC. *The word of Yahweh spoken by Jeremiah:* Jeremiah prophesied a 70-year Babylonian captivity (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10). The first deportation began in 605 BC and in 537 BC, 68 years later, the people began to return. So, by the time the people had returned and built the altar in 537 BC, the 70 years were completed (70 = 68 plus the years 605 and 637).

(1:2-3) *This is what...:* This version of Cyrus' decree (not the decree itself) was written by Ezra in Hebrew, the language of the Israelite captives, in contrast to the other version of the decree (vv. 6:3-5), a memorandum for the archives, written in Aramaic. *God of heaven... God of Israel:* Cyrus (who did not worship Yahweh) instituted the policy of placating the gods of his subject peoples instead of carrying off their images as the Syrians and the Babylonians had done earlier. Anyway, his generosity to the Jews was paralleled by his benevolence to the Babylonians. *He has appointed me to build a Temple for Him at Jerusalem:* The Temple was of outmost importance in the life of the people of Judah. Without the Temple there could be no sacrificial system, which was essential for the relationship of the nation with Yahweh.

(1:4) *People of any place where...:* Referred to the many Jews who did not wish to leave Mesopotamia but who had, anyway, to give their contribution to the reconstruction of the Temple. *Freewill offerings:* These were for the Temple, while the other contributions were for the returning people.

(1:5) *Family heads:* In ancient times families were extended families -more clans than modern nuclear families- each under the authority of a patriarch. *Judah and Benjamin:* The two main tribes of the Northern Kingdom, which the Babylonians had exiled.

(1:6) *Their neighbors assisted them with...:* As ordered by Cyrus' decree.

(1:7) *King Cyrus brought out...:* It was the custom for conquerors to carry off the images of the gods of the conquered cities. Since the Jews did not have an image of Yahweh, in 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar carried away only the temple articles.

(1:8) *Mithredath:* A Persian name meaning "given by/to Mithra," a Persian god. *Sheshbazzar:* The Babylonian name of Zerubbabel, meaning "Sin, protect the father" or "Shamash (Shashu), protect the father." Sin was the moon-god, and Shamash (Shashu is a variant) was the sun-god. In spite of his Babylonian name, Sheshbazzar was a Jewish official who served as a deputy governor of Judah under the satrap in Samaria (Jews in Babylon were often given "official" Babylonian names).

(1:9-10) *The inventory:* When Assyrian and Babylonian conquerors carried off plunder, their scribes made a careful inventory of all the goods sized.

(1:11) *5,400 articles of gold and silver:* The total of the figures in vv. 1:9-10 adds up to 2,499 only, because only the larger and more valuable vessels were specified there.

The list of the exiles who returned (2:1-70)

(2:1) Now these are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive to Babylon (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town, **(2:2)** in company with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigval, Rehum and Baanah):

The list of the men of the people of Israel:

(2:3) The descendants of Parosh: 2,172; **(2:4)** of Shephatiah: 372; **(2:5)** of Arah: 775; **(2:6)** of Pahath-Moab (through the line of Joshua and Joab): 2,812; **(2:7)** of Elam: 1,254; **(2:8)** of Zattu: 945; **(2:9)** of Zaccai: 760; **(2:10)** of Bani: 642; **(2:11)** of Bebai: 623; **(2:12)** of Azgad: 1,222; **(2:13)** of Adonikam: 666; **(2:14)** of Bigvai: 2,056; **(2:15)** of Adin: 454; **(2:16)** of Ater (through Hezekiah): 98; **(2:17)** of Bezai: 323; **(2:18)** of Jorah: 112; **(2:19)** of Hashum: 223; **(2:20)** of Gibbar: 95;

(2:21) the men of Bethlehem: 123; **(2:22)** of Netophah: 56; **(2:23)** of Anathoth: 128; **(2:24)** of Azmaveth: 42; **(2:25)** of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah and Beeroth: 743; **(2:26)** of Ramah and Geba: 621; **(2:27)** of Micmash: 122; **(2:28)** of Bethel and Ai: 223; **(2:29)** of Nebo: 52; **(2:30)** of Magbish: 156; **(2:31)** of the other Elam: 1,254; **(2:32)** of Harim: 320; **(2:33)** of Lod, Hadid and Ono: 725; **(2:34)** of Jericho: 345; **(2:35)** of Senaah: 3,630.

(2:36) The priests: the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family of Joshua): 973; **(2:37)** of Immer: 1,052; **(2:38)** of Pahhur: 1,247; **(2:39)** of Harim: 1,017.

(2:40) The Levites: the descendants of Joshua and Kadmiel (through the line of Hodaviah): 74.

(2:41) The singers: the descendants of Asaph: 128.

(2:42) The gatekeepers of the Temple: the descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita and Shobai: 139.

(2:43) The Temple servants: the descendants of Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaath, **(2:44)** Keros, Siaha, Padon, **(2:45)** Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, **(2:46)** Ha-gab, Shalmal, Hanan, **(2:47)** Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, **(2:48)** Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, **(2:49)** Uzza, Paseah, Besai, **(2:50)** Asnah, Meunim, Nephussim, **(2:51)** Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harthur, **(2:52)** Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, **(2:53)** Barkos, Sisera, Temah, **(2:54)** Neziah and Hatipha.

(2:55) The descendants of the servants of Solomon: the descendants of Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, **(2:56)** Jaala, Darkon, Giddel, **(2:57)** Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim and Ami.

(2:58) The Temple servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon: 392.

(2:59) The following came up from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon and Immer, but they could not show that their families were descendants from Israel: **(2:60)** The descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah and Nekoda: 652. **(2:61)** And from among the priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai (a man who had married a daughter of Barzillai the Gileadite and was called by their name). **(2:62)** These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. **(2:63)** The governor ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there was a priest ministering with the Urim and Thummim.

(2:64) The whole company numbered 42,360, **(2:65)** besides their 7,337 menservants and maidservants; and they also had 200 men and women singers. **(2:66)** They had 736 horses, 245 mules, **(2:67)** 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys.

(2:68) When they arrived at the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem, some of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings toward the rebuilding of the House of Yahweh on its site. **(2:69)** According to their ability they gave to the treasury for this work 61,000 drachmas of gold, 5,000 minas of silver and 100 priestly garments.

(2:70) The priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the Temple servants settled in their own towns, along with some of the other people, and the rest of the Israelites settled in their own towns.

(2:1-70) Though such a list of names and locations may seem unnecessary to the modern readers, it would have been of great encouragement to the original readers as they saw their own families and towns represented. The list of returning exiles in this chapter corresponds quite well to the list in Nehemiah 7:6-75. The list of localities indicates that the people retained the memories of their homes and that exiles from a wide background of tribes, villages and towns returned. To note that, in comparing the list here with that in Nehemiah 7:6-75, there are some differences in the names and numbers listed. About 20% of the numbers are not the same in Ezra and Nehemiah, but most of these differences may be explained by the notation used for units (vertical strokes) and for tens (horizontal strokes) which led to copying errors.

(2:1) *Province:* Judah, that is, the whole Israel.

(2:2) *Zerubbabel [Sheshbazzar]:* He was the legitimate heir to the throne of David, because he was the grandson of king Jehoiachin taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon in 586 BC. *Joshua:* His father, Jehozadak had been the high priest taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon in 586 BC. *Nehemiah:* Not the prophet of the book by that name. *Seraiah... Baanah:* Other -unknown- important Jews.

(2:3-20) A list of names, organized by family (clan).

(2:21-35) A list of villages and towns, many of which were in Benjamite territory north of Jerusalem. It is significant that there are no references to towns in the Negev, south of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar overran Judah in 597 BC, the Edomites took advantage of the situation and occupied that area.

(2:36-39) *Priests:* Four clans of priests.

(2:40) *Levites...74:* A relatively small number of Levites. Since the Levites had been entrusted with the subsidiary tasks of the Temple service, many of them may have found a more comfortable way of life in exile and decide to remain in Babylon.

(2:41) *Singers... Asaph:* Asaph was one of the three Levites appointed by David over the Temple singers.

(2:42) *Gatekeepers:* Usually Levites. Their primary function was to tend the gates of the Temple and to perform other subsidiary tasks.

(2:43-58) *Temple servants... Servants of Solomon...:* Probably the descendants of the Canaanites enslaved by Solomon.

(2:59-63) *Towns of...:* Places in Mesopotamia along the Kebar River where the Jews were settled by their Babylonian captors. The Jews had been settled in cities that had previously been depopulated by the Babylonians. *They could not show that... searched for their family records, but...:* Those un-able to demonstrate their descent, especially the priests, could not fully take part to the religious life of the people. *Governor:* Zerubbabel. *A priest... with the Urim and Thummim:* They were sacred lots and were often used in times of crises to determine the will of Yahweh. Urim ("cur-ses") meant "no" and Thummim ("perfections") meant "yes."

(2:64-67) *42,360:* To note that Ezra's total does not correspond with the numbers given: 24,144 (men of Israel) + 4,289 (priests) + 341 (Levites, singers, gatekeepers) + 392 (Temple servants, descendants of Solomon's servants) + 652 (men of unproven origin) + 7,337 (men- and maidservants) + 200 (men and women singers) = 37,355. This difference may be explained by the notation used for units (vertical strokes) and for tens (horizontal strokes) which led to copying errors. *Menservants and maidservants:* The

fact that so many servants (slaves) chose to follow their masters is indicative of the benevolent treatment of servants by the Jews. *Men and women singers*: Secular singers who sang at social events such as weddings and funerals, distinct from the Temple singers who were all male.

(2:68) Freewill offerings: Here, in Ezra, the freewill offerings come from the head of the families, while on the parallel passage of Nehemiah (vv. 7: 70-72) they come from the governor, the heads of the families and the rest of the people.

(2:69) 61,000 drachmas: That is, about 1,100 pounds (about 500 kilograms). *5,000 minas*: That is, about 3 tons.

(2:70) Settled in their own towns: Not in Jerusalem. Later, Nehemiah (Nehemiah 11:1-2) would be compelled to move people by lot to reinforce the population of Jerusalem.

Rebuilding the Altar (3:1-6)

(3:1) When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people assembled as one man in Jerusalem. **(3:2)** Then Joshua son of Jozadak and his fellows priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and his associates began to build the altar of [Yahweh] the God of Israel to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, in accordance with what is written in the Law of Moses, the man of Yahweh. **(3:3)** Despite their fear of the people around them, they built the altar on its [old] foundations and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to Yahweh, both the morning and evening sacrifices. **(3:4)** Then in accordance with what is written, they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles with the required number of burnt offerings, prescribed for each day. **(3:5)** After that, they presented the regular burnt offerings, the New Moon sacrifices and the sacrifices for all the appointed sacred feasts of Yahweh, as well as those brought as freewill offerings to Him. **(3:6)** On the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to Yahweh, though the foundation of His Temple had not yet been laid.

(3:1-6) The first task facing the people was the rebuilding of the Altar of Burnt Offering. This was essential for reestablishing the sacrificial system which set these people apart as a nation and which was used by Yahweh as a means for atoning Israel for its sins.

(3:1) The seventh month: Tishri (September-October, 537 BC), about three months after the arrival of the exiles in Judah. Tishri was one of the most sacred months of the Jewish calendar. *Assembled as one man*: This shows that they all agreed that the rebuilding project should begin.

(3:2-3) Joshua... Zerubbabel: The priest takes precedence over the civil

leader in view of the nature of the particular occasion (that is, the rebuilding of the altar for the burnt offerings). *In accordance with... the Law of Moses*: It was imperative that the returnees would come back to the Mosaic Covenant. Because their forefathers had left the covenant, the nation had been driven into captivity. The returnees did not have to make the same mistake. *People around them*: Foreigners who had been deported by the Assyrians into Palestine.

(3:4-6) Feast of the Tabernacles: "Tabernacles" or "Booths" because the Israelites lived in temporary shelters when Yahweh brought them out of Egypt. It commemorated the desert wandering and was celebrated from the 15th to the 22nd day of the seventh month, when the produce of the orchards and vines had been harvested. *New Moon*: Each month of the year was consecrated to Yahweh by the bringing of special sacrifices and the blowing of trumpets. This observance also involved cessation from normal work, especially at the beginning of the seventh month. *Required number of burnt offerings... sacrifices... the foundation... not yet been laid*: It is noteworthy that the restoration of the sacrifices preceded the reconstruction of the Temple itself.

Rebuilding the Temple (3:7-13)

(3:7) Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and gave food and drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, so that they would bring cedar logs by sea from Lebanon to Joppa, as authorized by Cyrus king of Persia.

(3:8) In the second month of the second year after their arrival at the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Joshua son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers (the priests and the Levites and all who had returned from the captivity to Jerusalem) began the work, appointing Levites twenty years of age and older to supervise the building of the House of Yahweh. **(3:9)** Joshua and his sons and brothers and Kadmiel and his sons (descendants of Hodaviah) and the sons of Henadad and their sons and brothers -all Levites- joined together in supervising those working on the House of Yahweh.

(3:10) When the builders laid the foundation of the Temple of Yahweh, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise Yahweh, as prescribed by David king of Israel. **(3:11)** With praise and thanksgiving they sang to Yahweh:

"He is good; His affection to Israel endures forever."

And all the people gave a great shout of praise to Yahweh, because the

foundation of His House was laid. **(3:12)** But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former Temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this Temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. **(3:13)** No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.

(3:7) *Then...*: There was a necessary period of preparation (seven months) to be in condition of rebuilding the Temple foundation. *Cedar logs*: As in the case of the first Temple, the Phoenicians (who were under the Persian empire) cooperated by sending timbers and workmen. The logs came from Lebanon, were shipped along the coast to Joppa and then carried overland to Jerusalem.

(3:8) *Second month*: The same month (May-June) in which Solomon had begun his Temple. *Second year*: Since the Jews returned to Judah in the spring of 537 BC, the second year would be 536 BC. *Levites twenty years of age*: In earlier times the lower age limit for Levites was 30 or 25 years. It was later reduced to 20, probably because there weren't enough Levites.

(3:9) *Joshua*: The Levite cited in the list of the returnee (v. 2:40).

(3:10) *Trumpets*: Made of hammered silver, a trumpet was "in length a little short of a cubit (about 18 inches or 46 cm); it is a narrow tube slightly thicker than a flute" (Josephus, Antiquities 3.12.6). The trumpets were always blown by priests, especially on joyous occasions, such as here and, later, at the dedication of the rebuilt wall of Jerusalem. *As prescribed by David*: It was David who introduced singers and musicians in the religious ceremonies and who laid down their regulations and duties.

(3:11) *He is good...*: A highly significant song of praise, because by it the religious leaders were acknowledging that Yahweh had again established His protection over the nation. *A great shout*: Now that the Temple worship had been reestablished, the people again recognized Yahweh's covenant with Israel.

(3.12-13) *Many of the older... wept aloud*: Solomon Temple had been destroyed 50 years earlier, in 586 BC, so some of the older people had seen and remembered it. And they contrasted the roughness of the current project with the magnificence of the first one. *Many... shouted for joy...*: For the younger people, the fact that they were rebuilding the Temple, and so the nation, was more than enough reason of rejoicing. *Shouts of joy... sound of weeping*: The people of Israel were accustomed to showing all their emotions in visible and audible ways. *And the sound was heard far away*: By the surrounding peoples, worried not so much for the shouting in itself, but for the renaissance of the Israelite nation.

Opposition to the rebuilding (4:1-5)

(4:1) When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a Temple for Yahweh, the God of Israel, **(4:2)** they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, "Let us help you build because, like you, we seek [Yahweh] your God and had been sacrificing to Him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."

(4:3) But Zerubbabel, Joshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, "You have no part with us in building a Temple to Yahweh. We alone will build it for Yahweh, the God of Israel, as king Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us.

(4:4) Then the peoples around them set out to make afraid the people of Judah and discourage them to go on building. **(4:5)** They hired [imperial] counselors to work against them and frustrate their plans. That during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Note: In vv. 4:1-23 there is a summary of various attempts to thwart the efforts of the Jews. In vv. 4:1-5 Ezra describes the events during the reign of Cyrus (559-530 BC); in v. 4:6 during the reign of Xerxes (485-465 BC); in vv. 4:7-23 during the reign of Artaxerxes (465-424 BC). Then, in v. 4:24 Ezra reverts to the time of Darius I the Great (522-486 BC), during whose reign the Temple was completed.

(4:1-2) Enemies of Judah... Let us help you: The peoples who offered their "help" were those living in Samaria. In so doing, they hoped to infiltrate the ranks and disrupt the building progress. *We seek [Yahweh] your God and...:* After the fall of Samaria in 722 BC, the Assyrian kings brought in various peoples from Mesopotamia and Aram. These peoples served their own gods but also took up the worship of Yahweh as the God of the land. *Esarhaddon:* He reigned over Assyria in 681-669 BC.

(4:3) You have no part...: Clearly those Samaritans were not of Jewish religion and did not recognize Yahweh as the Only God.

(4:4-5) Peoples around them: The Samaritans and other peoples brought in by the Assyrians, who feared a resurgence of Israel. *Set out to make afraid...:* After the refusal of the Israelites, their enemies tried to frighten the builders and to stop the building activity. *Hired counselors:* As the hiring of the false prophet Shemaiah, reported by Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:10-13). This policy of harassment continued until the reign of Darius, when the Temple was completed.

Later opposition under Xerxes and Artaxerxes (4:6-24)

(4:6) At the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, they [the neighboring peoples] lodged an accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

(4:7) And in the day of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Bishiam, Mithredah, Tabeel and the rest of their associates wrote a letter to Artaxerxes. The letter was written in the Aramaic script language.

(4:8) Rehum the commanding officer and Shimshai the secretary wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king as follows:

(4:9) Rehum the commanding officer and Shimshai the secretary together with the rest of their associates -the judges and officials over the men from Tripolis, Persia, Erech and Babylon, the Elamites of Susa, **(4:10)** and the other peoples whom the great and honorable Ashurbanipal deported and settled in the city of Samaria and elsewhere in Trans-Euphrates.

(4:11) (This is a copy of the letter they sent to him).

To King Artaxerxes,

From your servants, the men of Trans-Euphrates:

(4:12) The king should know that the Jews who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations.

(4:13) Furthermore, the king should know that if this city is built and its walls are restored, no more taxes, tribute or duty will be paid, and the royal revenues will suffer. **(4:14)** Now since we are under obligation to the palace and it is not proper for us to see the king dishonored, we are sending this message to inform the king, **(4:15)** so that a search may be made in the archives of your predecessors. In these records you will find that the city is a rebellious city, troublesome to kings and provinces, a place of rebellion from ancient times. That is why this city was destroyed. **(4:16)** We inform the king that if the city is built and its walls are restored, you will be left with nothing in Trans-Euphrates.

(4:17) The king sent this replay:

To Rehum the commanding officer, Shimshai the secretary and the rest of their associates living in Samaria and elsewhere in Trans-Euphrates:

(4:18) The letter you sent us has been read and translated in my presence.

(4:19) I issued an order and a search was made, and it was found that this city has a long history of revolt against kings and has been a place of rebellion and sedition. **(4:20)** Jerusalem has had powerful kings ruling over the whole of Trans-Euphrates, and taxes, tribute and duty were paid to them. **(4:21)** Now issue and order to these men to stop work, so that the city will not be rebuilt until I so order. **(4:22)** Be careful not to neglect this matter. Why let this threat grow, to the detriment of the royal interests?

(4:23) As soon as the copy of the letter of king Artaxerxes was read to

Rehum and Shimshai the secretary and their associates, they went immediately to the Jews in Jerusalem and compelled them by force to stop.

(4:24) Thus the work on the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem came to a standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

Note 1: In vv. 4:1-23 there is a summary of various attempts to thwart the efforts of the Jews. In vv. 4:1-5 Ezra describes the events during the reign of Cyrus (559-530 BC); in v. 4:6 during the reign of Xerxes (485-465 BC); in vv. 4:7-23 during the reign of Artaxerxes (465-424 BC). Then, in v. 4:24 Ezra reverts to the time of Darius I (522-486 BC), during whose reign the Temple was completed.

Note 2: The letters to and from Artaxerxes are out of place chronologically, but they follow logically here to show that the opposition Ezra had begun to describe (vv. 4:1-5) continued on for many years -to 485 BC, the year Xerxes began to reign (v. 4:6) and on into the days of Artaxerxes (465-424 BC), who was the king who reigned during the events recorded in chs. 7-10.

(4:6) *Xerxes:* Son of Darius I, and king of Persia in 485-465 BC. [*The neighboring peoples*] *lodged an accusation:* To note that Ezra recorded nothing of the nature or of the results of this first verbal accusation.

(4:7-8) *Artaxerxes:* Actually, Artaxerxes I, king of Persia in 465-424 BC. *Wrote a letter:* Near-Eastern kings employed an elaborate system of informers and spies, with agents all around their kingdoms. *Written in Aramaic script language:* Aramaic was the trade language of the day. The letter would then be translated in Persian and read before the king. *Commanding officer:* An official who had the role of a chancellor or commissioner. It is clear that opposition against the Jews was strong during the time of Artaxerxes.

(4:9) *Associates:* One of the noteworthy characteristics of Persian bureaucracy was that each responsibility was shared among many colleagues. *Babylon:* During the reign of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (669-627 BC), a major revolt had taken place (652-648 BC). The men of Babylon and the other cities mentioned were the descendants of the rebels, whom the Assyrians deported to the west. *Susa:* Because of Susa's part in the rebellion, Ashurbanipal brutally destroyed it in 640 BC.

(4:10) *Ashurbanipal:* The last great Assyrian king (669-626 BC), famed for his library at Nineveh, continued the policy of deportation begun by his father Esarhaddon (v.4:2). *Deported and settled:* It is characteristic of such deportations that the descendants of the populations that had been removed from their homeland nearly two centuries earlier should still stress their origin.

(4:11) *Trans-Euphrates*: Literally "beyond the River," that is, the Euphrates River. From the Palestinian point of view it was Mesopotamia. From the Mesopotamian point of view it included Aram, Phoenicia and Palestine. The Persians also called this area Athura.

(4:12-13) *The king should know...*: Their version of the facts. *Restoring the walls and repairing the foundations*: The opposition was obviously not against the rebuilding of the Temple, for it had been completed in 516 BC, but against an attempt to begin rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem.

(4:14) *We are under obligation to the palace*: Literally "we eat the salt of the palace." Salt was made a royal monopoly by the Ptolemies in Egypt and by the Persian kings as well. *King dishonored*: If Jerusalem was allowed to be fortified, then the city and the territory which it would control would no longer pay taxes or tribute to the Persians, and this would dishonor the king.

(4:15) *Archives*: There were several repositories of such documents at the major capitals. Those royal archives preserved documents for centuries.

(4:16) *Left with nothing in Trans-Euphrates*: Suggesting that the restoration of Jerusalem would bring back its dominance on Trans-Euphrates, as at the time of kings David and Solomon.

(4:17-18) *The letter... read and translated*: The letter, written in Aramaic, had been translated in Persian and read before the king.

(4:19) *Revolt... rebellion and sedition*: Jerusalem had rebelled against the Assyrians in 701 BC and against the Babylonians in 589 BC.

(4:20) *Jerusalem has had powerful kings*: Confirming what was written in the letter (v. 4:16).

(4:21-23) *Issue an order... to stop... they... compelled them by force to stop*: Artaxerxes was the same king who later (in 445 BC) changed this edict and allowed Nehemiah to return and rebuild the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:1-9). However, the immediate result was a forced cessation of the building activity because Israel's enemies used force to back up the Persian king's decision.

Note: The events of vv. 4:7-23 occurred prior to 445 BC, when Nehemiah, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, receives a report from Jerusalem about the condition of Jerusalem's wall (Nehemiah 1:1-3).

(4:24) *The work on the House of Yahweh...*: After the long digression (vv. 4:6-23) describing the opposition to the Jewish efforts, Ezra comes back to his original subject (left at v. 4:5) of the rebuilding of the Temple. The result of the opposition during Cyrus' reign was that the work on the Temple was suspended until about 18 years after the people had returned to the land. *Standstill until the second year of the reign of Darius*: From Nisan 1

(April 3), 520 BC, until February 21, 519 BC. In that year the prophet Haggai exhorted Zerubbabel to begin rebuilding the Temple (Haggai 1:1-5).

Tattenai's letter to Darius (5:1-17)

(5:1) Now Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the prophet, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem in the name of [Yahweh] the God of Israel, Who was over them. **(5:2)** Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Joshua son of Jehozadak set to work to rebuild the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem. And the prophets of Yahweh were with them, helping them.

(5:3) At that time Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates went to them and asked, "Who authorized you to rebuild this temple and restore this structure?" **(5:4)** They also asked, "What are the names of the men constructing this building?" **(5:5)** But the eye of Yahweh was watching over the elders of the Jews, and they were not stopped until a report could go to Darius and his written reply be received.

(5:6) This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates, the officials of Trans-Euphrates, sent to king Darius. **(5:7)** The report they sent him read as follows:

To king Darius, perfect health.

(5:8) The king should know that we went to the district of Judah, to the Temple of [Yahweh] the great God. The people are building it with large stones and placing the timbers in the walls. The work is carried on with diligence and making rapid progress under their direction.

(5:9) We questioned the elders and asked them, "Who authorized you to rebuild the Temple and restore this structure?" **(5:10)** We also asked them their names, so that we could write down the names of their leaders for your information.

(5:11) This is the answer they gave us:

"We are the servants of [Yahweh] the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the Temple that was built many years ago, one that a great king of Israel built and finished. **(5:12)** But because our fathers angered [Yahweh] the God of heaven, He handed them over to Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean, king of Babylon, who destroyed this Temple and deported the people to Babylon.

(5:13) However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, king Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild this House of Yahweh. **(5:14)** He even removed from the temple of Babylon the gold and silver articles of the House of Yahweh, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and brought to the temple in Babylon.

(5:15) Then king Cyrus gave them to a man named Sheshbazaar [Zerubbabel], whom he had appointed governor, and he told him, 'Take these articles and go and deposit them in the Temple in Jerusalem. And rebuild the House of Yahweh on its site.' **(5:16)** So this Sheshbazaar [Zerubbabel] came and laid the foundations of the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem. From that day to the present it has been under construction but is not yet finished.

(5:17) Now if it pleases the king, let a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to see if king Cyrus did in fact issue a decree to rebuild this House of Yahweh in Jerusalem. Then let the king send us his decision in this matter."

(5:1) Haggai... Zechariah: Beginning on August 29, 520 BC (Haggai 1:1), and continuing until December 18, 520 BC (Haggai 2:1,10,20), the prophet Haggai delivered a series of messages to stir up the people to resume work on the Temple. Two months after Haggai's first speech, Zechariah joined him (Zechariah 1:1). [*Yahweh*]... *Who was over them:* They "prophesied," that is, related messages of Yahweh who, in these circumstances, was in spiritual communion with them, and was guiding them.

(5:2) Zerubbabel: He was the son of Shealtiel and the grandson of Jehoiachin, the last king of Judah. Zerubbabel was the last of the Davidic line to be entrusted with political authority by the occupying powers. *Joshua:* His father, Jehozadak had been the high priest taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon in 586 BC. *Set to work...:* The work on the Temple had been stopped from 536 to 520 BC (Ezra 4:1-5,24). *The prophets... helping:* Both Haggai and Zechariah were helping by exhorting and encouraging. To remember that (Ezra did not deal with that question in his book) they were vitally concerned with the rebuilding of the Temple because they realized that their nation could never fulfill the obligations of the Mosaic Covenant until the Temple worship was reinstated. Both the prophets placed the blame for the hard times the nation experienced during this period on the people's lack of obedience in not rebuilding the Temple.

(5:3-4) Tattenai... Shethar-Bozenai: The Persian governor and a high Persian official, that is, the local authorities who were responsible to the Persian crown. *Who authorized you...?:* As soon as the work was resumed, another attempt was made to stop it (Ezra 4:1-5).

(5:5) Yahweh was watching: Clearly, Yahweh was at work because even the opposition itself, at the end, happened to be useful to the reconstruction project. *They were not stopped:* The Persian governor gave the Jews the benefit of doubt by not stopping the work while the inquiry was proceeding.

(5:6-7) *Letter... sent to king Darius. Report they sent him:* Texts found in the royal city of Persepolis confirm that such inquiries were sent directly to the king himself, revealing the close attention he paid to minute details.

(5:8) *Large stones... timbers. The work... with diligence:* Better explained in v. 6:4, this construction design was intended to cushion the building against earthquake shocks.

(5:9-10) *Who authorized you...?:* Taking for granted that they would not dare to go on with such a kind of major work without having received the appropriate authorization.

(5:11) *The answer:* Tattenai's letter then included the Jews' answer to his questions. *A great king of Israel:* Solomon, who begun building the Temple in the fourth year of his reign (966 BC). The construction lasted seven years.

(5:12) *Nebuchadnezzar the Chaldean:* The Chaldeans were the inhabitants of the southern regions of Mesopotamia who established the Neo-Babylonian Empire (612-539 BC). Their origins are obscure. In the late seventh century BC the Chaldeans, led by Nabopolassar (Nebuchadnezzar's father), overthrew the Assyrians.

(5:13-16) *King Cyrus issued a decree...:* The elders of the Jews gave all the informations needed to retrieve the original authorization to rebuild the Temple and the city of Jerusalem and, furthermore, to have in their hands huge quantities of gold and silver articles brought back from Babylon (those taken by Nebuchadnezzar from the Temple).

(5:17) *A search... in the royal archives:* There were several repositories of such documents at the major capitals. Those royal archives preserved documents for centuries.

The decree of Darius (6:1-12)

(6:1) King Darius then issued an order, and they searched in the archives stored in the treasury of Babylon. **(6:2)** A scroll was found in the citadel of Ecbatana in the province of Media, and this was written on it:

Memorandum:

(6:3) In the first year of king Cyrus [over Babylon], the king issued a decree concerning the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem:

Let the Temple be rebuilt as a place to present sacrifices, and let its foundations be laid. It is to be sixty cubits high and sixty cubits wide, **(6:4)** with three courses of large stones and one of timbers. The costs are to be paid by the royal treasury. **(6:5)** Also, the gold and silver articles of the House of Yahweh, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the Temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the Temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the House of Yahweh.

(6:6) Now then, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates and Shetar-Bozenai and you, their fellow officials of that province, stay away from there.

(6:7) Do not interfere with the work of this Temple of Yahweh. Let the governor of the Jews and the Jewish elders rebuild this House of Yahweh on its site.

(6:8) Moreover, I hereby decree what you are to do for these elders of the Jews in the construction of the House of Yahweh:

The expenses of these men are to be fully paid out of the royal treasury, from the revenues of Trans-Euphrates, so that the work will not stop. **(6:9)** Whatever is needed -young bulls, rams, male lambs for burnt offerings to [Yahweh] the God of heaven, and wheat, salt wine and oil, as requested by the priests in Jerusalem- must be given them daily without fail, **(6:10)** so that they may offer sacrifices pleasing to [Yahweh] the God of heaven and pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.

(6:11) Furthermore, I decree that if anyone changes this edict, a beam is to be pulled from his house and lifted up and he is to be impaled on it. And for this crime his house is to be made a pile of rubble. **(6:12)** May Yahweh, Who has caused His Name to dwell there, overthrow any king or people who lift a hand to change this decree or to destroy this Temple in Jerusalem.

I Darius have decreed it. Let it be carried out with diligence.

(6:1) *Archives... in the treasury at Babylon:* Confirming the existence of such kind of archives, many documents have also been found in the so-called "treasury" area of Persepolis.

(6:2) *Ecbatana:* One of the four capitals (along with Babylon, Persepolis and Susa) of the Persian empire. It corresponds to the present Iranian city of Hamadan. To note that Tattenai had requested that Babylon's archives should be searched for the document (v. 5:17), but it was not found there. Instead it was found in Ecbatana, 300 miles northeast of Babylon, because it was the place where Cyrus had spent the summer of 538 BC, when he issued the decree. *Province of Media:* The homeland of the Medes in north-western Iran. The Medes were an Indo-European tribe related to the Persians.

(6:3) *First year of king Cyrus [over Babylon]: 538-537 BC. A decree:* Comparing this version of Cyrus' decree (written in Aramaic) with the Hebrew version given by Ezra in vv. 1:2-4, we can see that the Aramaic one is written in a more sober administrative style. *Sixty cubits high and sixty cubits wide:* (1 cubit = 1.5 feet). These are not the actual dimensions of the Temple, but the maximum dimensions of a building the Persians were willing to subsidize.

(6:4) *Three courses of large stones and one of timbers:* Such a design was intended to cushion the building against earthquake shocks.

(6:5) *Gold and silver articles... are to be returned:* It was the custom for conquerors to carry off the images of the gods of the conquered cities. Since the Jews did not have an image of Yahweh, Nebuchadnezzar carried away only the Temple articles and stored them in the royal treasury of Babylon.

(6:6-7) *Stay away... Do not interfere with the work:* A clear order, leaving no possible doubt.

(6:8) *Paid out of the royal treasury:* It was a consistent policy of Persian kings to help restore sanctuaries in their empire, in view of improving the relations with the subject populations.

(6:9) *Whatever is needed...:* It is well known that the Persian monarchs were interested in the details of foreign cults.

(6:10) *Pray for the well-being of the king and his sons:* In the inscription on the Cyrus Cylinder (made of baked clay), the king asks: "May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask Bel and Nebo daily for a long life for me."

(6:11) *If anyone changes this edict:* It was customary at the end of decrees and treaties to append a long list of curses against anyone who might disregard them. *Impaled:* A normal practice in the Assyrian and Persian empires. According to Herodotus (3.159), Darius I impaled 3,000 Babylonians when the city of Babylon rebelled against the Persians.

(6:12) *May Yahweh... overthrow:* King Darius involves Yahweh -for him only the God of the Jews- in curses. *Caused His Name to dwell:* Equivalent to "decided to dwell."

Completion and dedication of the Temple (6:13-18)

(6:13) Then, because of the decree king Darius had sent, Tattenai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai and their associates carried it out with diligence. **(6:14)** So the elders of the Jews continued to build and prosper under the preaching of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo. They finished building the Temple according to the command of [Yahweh] the God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. **(6:15)** The Temple was completed on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of king Darius.

(6:16) Then the people of Israel -the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles- celebrated the dedication of the House of Yahweh with joy. **(6:17)** For the dedication of this House of Yahweh they offered a hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred male lambs and as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, one for each of the tribes of Israel. **(6:18)** And

they installed the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their groups for the service of Yahweh in Jerusalem, according to what is written in the Book of Moses.

(6:13) *Then, because of the decree...:* So Tattenai's inquire backfired. Instead of stopping the Temple work, he had to let it proceed and even had to help pay for it out of his revenues.

(6:14) *The Jews continued to build:* Until this moment, the work on the Temple had made little progress not only because of the opposition of Israel's enemies, but also because of the preoccupation of the returnees with their own homes. They had placed their own interests first and, as a consequence, Yahweh had sent them famine as a judgment (Haggai 1:5-6, 10-11). Spurred by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, and under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, a new effort was begun (Haggai 1:12-15). *The decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes:* The reference to Artaxerxes seems out of place, because he did not contribute to rebuilding the Temple at the time of Haggai and Zechariah. Anyway, he authorized the reconstruction of Jerusalem's wall later, at the time of Ezra (Ezra 7:21).

(6:15) *The third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of... Darius:* March 12, 516 BC.

(6:16-17) *For the dedication they offered...:* The number of animals sacrificed was small in comparison with the tremendous amount sacrificed by Solomon at the dedication of his Temple, when thousands rather than hundreds were offered (22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats). *Twelve goats...:* The 12 goats for the sin offering show that the postexilic community still envisioned a unified Israel consisting of all 12 tribes, even though practically only 2 had survived.

(6:18) *Priests... divisions:* The priests were organized into 24 divisions, each of which served at the Temple for a week at a time. The Levites, who were helpers to the priest, were organized in a similar way.

The Passover (6:19-22)

(6:19) On the fourteenth day of the first month, the exiles celebrated the Passover. **(6:20)** The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were all ceremonially clean. The Levites slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the exiles, for their brothers the priests and for themselves. **(6:21)** So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek Yahweh, the God of Israel. **(6:22)** For seven days they celebrated with joy the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because Yahweh had filled them with joy by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria, so that he assisted them in the work on the House of Yahweh, the God of Israel.

(6:19) *Fourteenth day of the first month:* April 21, 516 BC. The Temple had been completed the previous month and now, for the first time in 70 years, the people had again the possibility of celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem's Temple.

(6:20) *Purified... ceremonially clean:* Priests and Levites had to be ceremonially clean to fulfill their ritual functions.

(6:21) *All who had separated...:* The returnees were willing to accept all the Jews who had remained in the land and had kept themselves free from, or repented of, the paganism of the foreigners who had been introduced in the area by the Assyrians.

(6:22) *For seven days:* The seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread was on days 15-21 of the first month, immediately after the Passover. *King of Assyria:* A surprising title for Darius, but the term "Assyria" was commonly used for the former territories the Assyrians had occupied.

Ezra comes to Jerusalem (7:1-10)

(7:1) After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah, **(7:2)** the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub, **(7:3)** the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth, **(7:4)** the son of Zerariah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki, **(7:5)** the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest -**(7:6)** this Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which Yahweh, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of Yahweh his God was on him. **(7:7)** Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and Temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of king Artaxerxes.

(7:8) Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. **(7:9)** He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of [Yahweh] his God was on him. **(7:10)** For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of Yahweh, and to teaching His decrees and laws to Israel.

(7:1-5) *After these things:* After the completion of the Temple in 516 BC. *Artaxerxes:* Actually, Artaxerxes I, who reigned in 465-424 BC. *Ezra son of...:* The usual long list of ancestors, to make sure of Ezra's priestly descent from Aaron.

(7:6-7) *Ezra came... in the seventh year of king Artaxerxes:* 458 BC, 58 years after the completion of the Temple.

(7:8-9) *Seventh year of the king. First day of the first month... first day of the fifth month:* Ezra left Babylon on the first of Nisan (April 8, 458 BC) and arrived in Jerusalem on the first of Ab (August 4, 458 BC). The spring was the best time for such journeys. Although the actual distance from Babylon and Jerusalem is about 500 miles, the travelers had to cover a total of about 900 miles, going northwest along the Euphrates River and then south. The relatively slow pace was caused by the presence of the elderly and the children who were returning to Jerusalem with Ezra.

(7:10) *Ezra had devoted himself to...:* Literally, "set his heart firmly" which gives a clear idea of Ezra's determination in studying Yahweh's Law, obeying it, and teaching it to others.

King Artaxerxes' letter to Ezra (7:11-28)

(7:11) This is the copy of the letter king Artaxerxes had given to Ezra the priest and teacher, a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of Yahweh for Israel:

(7:12) Artaxerxes, king of kings,

To Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of [Yahweh] the God of heaven, perfect health.

(7:13) Now I decree that any of the Israelites in my kingdom, including priests and Levites, who wish to go to Jerusalem with you, may go. **(7:14)** You are sent by the king and his seven advisers to inquire about Judah and Jerusalem with regard to the Law of [Yahweh] your God, which is in your hand. **(7:15)** Moreover, you are to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his advisers have freely given to [Yahweh] the God of Israel, Whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, **(7:16)** together with all the silver and gold you may obtain from the province of Babylon, as well as the freewill offerings of the people and priests for the Temple of [Yahweh], their God, in Jerusalem. **(7:17)** With this money be sure to buy bulls, rams and male lambs, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and sacrifice them on the altar of the Temple of [Yahweh] your God in Jerusalem.

(7:18) You and your brother Jews may then do whatever seems best with the rest of the silver and gold, in accordance with the will of [Yahweh] your God. **(7:19)** Deliver to [Yahweh] the God of Jerusalem all the articles entrusted to you for worship in the Temple of [Yahweh] your God. **(7:20)** And anything else needed for the Temple of [Yahweh] your God that you may have occasion to supply, you may provide from the royal treasury.

(7:21) Now I, king Artaxerxes, order all the treasurers of Trans-Euphrates to provide with diligence whatever Ezra the priest, a teacher of the Law of [Yahweh] the God of heaven, may ask you **-(7:22)** up to a hundred ta-

lents of silver, a hundred cors of wheat, a hundred baths of wine, a hundred baths of olive oil, and salt without limit. **(7:23)** Whatever [Yahweh] the God of heaven has prescribed, let it be done with diligence for the Temple of [Yahweh] the God of heaven. Why should there be the wrath [of Yahweh] against the realm, the king and his sons? **(7:24)** You are also to know that you have no authority to impose taxes, tribute or duty on any of the priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, Temple servants or other workers at this House of Yahweh.

(7:25) And you, Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of [Yahweh] your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates -all who know the laws of [Yahweh] your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them. **(7:26)** Whoever does not obey the law of [Yahweh] your God and the law of the king must surely be punished by death, banishment, confiscation of property, or imprisonment.

(7:27) Praise be to Yahweh, the God of our fathers, Who has put it into the king's heart to bring honor to His house in Jerusalem in this way **(7:28)** and Who has extended His good favor to me before the king and his advisers and all the king's powerful officials. Because the hand of Yahweh my God was on me, I took courage and gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

(7:11-12) *King Artaxerxes... king of kings:* This title was originally used by the Assyrian kings, since their empire incorporated many kingdoms. It was then used by the later Babylonian and Persian kings. *Copy of the letter...:* No reason for Artaxerxes' decree is given. It is obvious to suppose that Ezra had asked permission to take a group of exiles back to Judah and that this decree was the official granting of his request.

(7:13) *Israelites:* It is worthy to note that "Israel" is used rather than "Judah." It was Ezra's aim to make one Israel of all who returned. The marked Jewish phraseology of this decree, addressed mainly to the Jews, may have resulted from the king's use of Jewish officials, quite probably Ezra himself, for its composition.

(7:14) *Seven advisors:* Nobles who had special access to the king, a Persian practice reported by the Greek historians Herodotus and Xenophon. *Sent... to inquire about the Law:* Actually, giving Ezra the authority to investigate the reasons behind a 58 years stop in the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

(7:15) *Silver and gold... freely given:* The Persian treasury had ample funds, and benevolence was a well-attested policy of Persian kings.

(7:16) *Freewill offerings of the people:* The custom of sending gifts to Jerusalem from the Jews who lived outside Palestine continued until the Jewish-Roman War.

(7:17-20) *Be sure to buy... Anything else needed...:* Showing again, as in v. 6:9, how much the Persian monarchs were interested in the details of foreign cults.

(7:21-22) *Provide... up to...:* Of course, there was a limit, even if very high, to the generosity of the Persian king. *A hundred talents of silver:* An enormous amount, that is, 7,500 pounds or 3,400 kg. *A hundred cores:* The wheat necessary for grain offerings, corresponding to 22,000 dry liters. *A hundred baths:* 600 gallons or 2,200 liters. *Salt without limit:* Salt was a royal monopoly and, as such, this was a personal gift of the king.

(7:23) *Why should...?:* Egypt had revolted against the Persians in 460 BC and had expelled them with the help of the Athenians in 459 BC. In 458 BC, when Ezra traveled to Jerusalem, the Persians were involved in suppressing the revolt and, clearly, they were trying not to have another one.

(7:24) *No... taxes... or duty on any of...:* Priests and other Temple personnel were usually given exemptions from taxes or enforced labor.

(7:25) *You, Ezra... appoint...:* So making of him the actual governor of Israel.

(7:26) *Whoever does not obey... must surely been punished:* The powers given to Ezra were extensive and extended also to secular fields. Most probably the implementation of these provisions involved Ezra in a great deal of traveling, which would explain the silence about his activities between his arrival and the arrival of Nehemiah 13 years later.

(7:27-28) *Praise be to Yahweh... who has put into the king's heart:* Here Ezra recognizes the direct intervention of Yahweh in favor of His people. *The hand of Yahweh... was on me:* A typical example of spiritual communion Yahweh-man in Old Testament times, possible only in case of Yahweh's initiative. But now, in New Testament times, it is fully open to each man's initiative.

List of the family heads returning with Ezra (8:1-14)

(8:1) These are the family heads and those registered with them who came up with me from Babylon during the reign of king Artaxerxes:

(8:2) Of the descendants of Phineas, Gershom; of the descendants of Ithamar, Daniel; of the descendants of David, Hattush; **(8:3)** of the descendants of Shecaniah; of the descendants of Parosh, Zechariah, and with him were registered 150 men; **(8:4)** of the descendants of Pahath-Moab, Eliehoenai son of Zerariah, and with him 200 men; **(8:5)** of the descendants of

Zattu, Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men; **(8:6)** of the descendants of Adin, Ebed son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men; **(8:7)** of the descendants of Elam, Jeshaiiah son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men; **(8:8)** of the descendants of Shephatiah, Zebadiah son of Michael, and with him 80 men; **(8:9)** of the descendants of Joab, Obadiah son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men; **(8:10)** of the descendants of Bani, Shelomith son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men; **(8:11)** of the descendants of Bebai, Zechariah son of Bebai, and with him 28 men; **(8:12)** of the descendants of Azgad, Johanan son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men; **(8:13)** of the descendants of Adonikam, the last ones, whose names were Eliphelet, Jeuel and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men; **(8:14)** of the descendants of Bigvai, Uthai and Zaccur, and with them 70 men.

(8:1-14) *The family heads and... who came up with me:* Here Ezra lists 15 family heads and their descendants who accompanied him in his return from Mesopotamia. So there were 15 family heads, 1,496 male descendants, plus their women and children, all traveling with Ezra. These figures do not include the Levites (40) and the Temple servants (220), considered later, in vv. 8:18-20. Most of the people listed here were related to the families who had returned previously with Zerubbabel in 537 BC. This group, with wo-men and children, may have totaled between 4,000 and 5,000; a much smaller group than the nearly 50,000 of the first return.

The return to Jerusalem (8:15-36)

(8:15) I assembled them at the canal that flows toward Ahava, and we camped there three days. When I checked among the people and the priests, I found no Levites there. **(8:16)** So I summoned Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah and Meshullam, who were leaders, and Joiarib and Elnathan, who were men of learning, **(8:17)** and I sent them to Iddo, the leader in Casiphia. I told them what to say to Iddo and his kinsmen, the Temple servants [living] in Casiphia, so that they might bring servants to us for the House of Yahweh. **(8:18)** Because the gracious hand of Yahweh was on us, they brought us Sherebiah, a capable man, from the descendants of Mahli, son of Levi, the son of Israel, and Sherebiah's sons and brothers, 18 men; **(8:19)** and Hasahbiah, together with Jeshaiiah from the descendants of Merari, and his brothers and their sons, 20 men. **(8:20)** They also brought 220 of the Temple servants -a body that David and his officials had established to assist the Levites. All were registered by name.

(8:21) There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might

humble ourselves before Yahweh and ask Him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. **(8:22)** I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of Yahweh our God is on everyone who looks to Him, but His anger is great against all who forsake Him." **(8:23)** So we fasted and petitioned Yahweh about this, and He answered our prayers.

(8:24) Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah and ten of their brothers, **(8:25)** and I weighed out to them the offerings of silver and gold and the articles that the king, his advisers, his officials and all Israel present there had donated for the House of Yahweh. **(8:26)** I weighed out to them 650 talents of silver, silver articles weighing 100 talents, 100 talents of gold, **(8:27)** 20 bowls of gold valued at 1,000 darics, and two fine articles of polished bronze, as precious as gold.

(8:28) I said to them, "You as well as these articles are consecrated to Yahweh. The silver and gold are a freewill offering to Yahweh, the God of your fathers. **(8:29)** Guard them carefully until you weigh them out in the chambers of the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem before the leading priests and the Levites and the family heads of Israel." **(8:30)** Then the priests and Levites received the silver and gold and sacred articles that had been weighed out to be taken to the House of Yahweh in Jerusalem.

(8:31) On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of Yahweh was on us, and He protected us from enemies and bandits along the way. **(8:32)** So we arrived in Jerusalem, where we rested three days.

(8:33) On the fourth day, in the House of Yahweh, we weighed out the silver and gold and the sacred articles into the hands of Meremoth son of Uriah, the priest. Eleazar son of Phinehas was with him, and so were the Levites Jozabad son of Joshua and Noadiah son of Binnui. **(8:34)** Everything was accounted for by number and weight, and the entire weight was recorded at that time.

(8:35) Then the exiles, those who had returned from captivity, sacrificed burnt offerings to [Yahweh] the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven male lambs and, as a sin offering, twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to Yahweh. **(8:36)** They also delivered the king's orders to the royal satraps and to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, who then gave assistance to the people and to the House of Yahweh.

(8:15) *Canal that flows toward Ahava:* One of the many canals for irrigation and navigation built by the Assyrians and the Persians, flowing either

into the Euphrates or the Tigris River. *Camped three days*: From the 9th to the 11th day of Nisan, as the journey began on the 12th (April 8, 458 BC. vv. 8:31 and 7:7-9). *No Levites*: Since they were entrusted with only subsidiary tasks, they may have found a more comfortable way of life in exile.

(8:16-19) *So I summoned... I sent... I told...*: It is clear that Ezra had problems in finding an appropriate number of Levites. *Casiphia*: Its location is no longer known. *18 men... 20 men*: Only 38 Levites from two families were found who were willing to follow Ezra to Jerusalem.

(8:20) *220 of the Temple servants*: Probably descendants, with the servants of Solomon, of the Canaanites enslaved by king Solomon (vv. 2:43-58).

(8:21) *Proclaimed a fast... humble ourselves*: First, Ezra took care that spiritual preparation was made for the journey. Being humble before Yahweh shows one's spiritual dependence, his acknowledgment that Yahweh is in total control. *Safe journey*: The journey was long and dangerous, about 900 miles by land. Also the actual distance from Babylon and Jerusalem is about 500 miles, the travelers had to cover a total of about 900 miles, going northwest along the Euphrates River and then south. And there were many elderly and children traveling with the caravan.

(8:22) *I was ashamed to ask...*: The vast treasures they were carrying with them would attract many robbers. Having proclaimed his faith in Yahweh's ability to protect the caravan, Ezra was embarrassed to ask for human protection.

(8:23) *So we fasted and petitioned*: In this way declaring their faith in Yahweh.

(8:24-25) *I set apart... I weighed out to them*: Making those men responsible for the treasures they were transporting.

(8:26-27) *650 talents*: 48,500 pounds or 22,000 kg. *100 talents*: 7,500 pounds or 3,400 kg. *1,000 darics*: 19 pounds or 8.5 kg of gold.

(8:28-30) *I said to them... Guard them carefully...*: The formal assignment of the responsibility for the treasures they were carrying to Jerusalem.

(8:31) *Twelfth day of the first month*: Of the month of Nisan, that is, April 8, 458 BC (vv. 7:8-9).

(8:32) *Arrived in Jerusalem*: On the first of Ab (August 4, 458 BC), four months after their departure (vv. 7:8-9).

(8:33-34) *We weighed out... Everything was accounted for... was recorded*: According to the Babylonian and the Persian practice, every important transaction had to be recorded in writing and Ezra surely had to send back to Artaxerxes a signed certification of the delivery of the treasures.

(8:35) *Then the exiles... sacrificed*: The usual thanksgiving offerings.

(8:36) *King's orders to the royal satraps:* A copy of the king's edict was given to the local officials to make official and legal all their activities.

Ezra's prayer about intermarriage (9:1-15)

(9:1) After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, "The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separated from the neighboring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. **(9:2)** They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness."

(9:3) When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled my hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. **(9:4)** Then everyone who trembled at the words of [Yahweh], God of Israel, about the unfaithfulness of the exiles, gathered around me. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.

(9:5) Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose full of humiliation, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to Yahweh my God **(9:6)** and prayed:

"O [Yahweh] my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to You, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. **(9:7)** From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subject to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today.

(9:8) But now, for a brief moment, Yahweh our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in His sanctuary. And so He gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. **(9:9)** Though we are slaves, [Yahweh] our God has not deserted us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia, He has granted us new life to rebuild His House and repair its ruins, and He has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.

(9:10) But now, O Yahweh our God, what can we say after this? For we have disregarded the commands **(9:11)** You gave through your servants the prophets when You said: 'The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. **(9:12)** Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them at any time,

that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it to your children as an everlasting inheritance.'

(9:13) What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, O Yahweh our God, You have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this. **(9:14)** Shall we again break Your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would You not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor? **(9:15)** O Yahweh, God of Israel; You are righteous! We are already left as a remnant. Here we are before You in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in Your presence."

(9:1) *After these things had been done:* The handing over of the treasures, the burnt offerings in the Temple, and the delivery of the king's orders to the local officials described in vv. 8:33-36. *The people... have not kept themselves separate:* Those who brought Ezra's attention to the problem of inter-marriage were probably the civil leaders of the community rather than the religious leaders, who were themselves guilty. *Neighboring peoples:* The eight groups mentioned are representative of the original inhabitants of Canaan before the Israelite conquest. Only the Ammonites, Moabites and Egyptians were still living there in the post-exilic period.

(9:2) *They have taken... The leaders and officials have laid the way:* Clearly they were mainly speaking of the Israelites already living there, those who came back to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Joshua in 537 BC. One of the reasons for such intermarriages may have been the shortage of returning Jewish women who were available for marriage. *Unfaithfulness:* Marrying a non-Israelite was an act of infidelity for the people of Israel.

(9:3) *Tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair...:* A common way to publicly express grief or distress. Ezra knew that it was just for this sort of sin that his nation had gone into captivity, and he was afraid they would go into captivity again.

(9:4-6) *Set appalled until the evening sacrifice:* The informants should have visited Ezra in the morning, so he must have sat for many hours, till 3 PM, the time for the evening sacrifice, which was also a time for prayer and confession. *I rose... and prayed:* Ezra's prayer reveals much about him. He identified himself with the nation in their sin even though he was innocent of the offence. Ezra understood that the nation stood together under the covenant and that this fact, especially since it had been led by the leaders of the nation, could jeopardize the entire nation before Yahweh.

(9:7) *From the days of our forefathers:* The Israelites were always conscious that the actions of their ancestors -and their own, as well- had deter-

mined the situation of captivity they were living in. *Subject to...*: Foreign defeat and domination.

(9:8) *Yahweh has been gracious*: Allowing the remnant of His people to return to His sanctuary, that is, Jerusalem.

(9:9) *Though we are slaves*: They did not forget to be under Persian domination. *Kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia*: The Persian kings of that period were favorably disposed to the Jews: Cyrus (559-530 BC) gave the permission to return; his son Cambyses (530-522 BC), though not named in the Bible, also favored the Jews; Darius I (522-486 BC) renewed the decree of Cyrus; his son Xerxes (486-465 BC) granted privileges and protection to the Jews; his son Artaxerxes (465-424 BC) gave authorizations to Ezra and to Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem. *Wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem*: Not only metaphorical, but also physical, against all who were against the reconstruction of Jerusalem.

(9:10-12) *We have disregarded the commands...*: Intermarriage with local populations was clearly forbidden from the moment the Israelites entered in the Promised Land under the guidance of Joshua, after Moses' death. The purpose of the prohibition was to avoid the corruption of the Canaanite idolatry and the immoral practices associates with it.

(9:13) *What has happened to us*: The conquest of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple and the deportation to Babylon in 586 BC.

(9:14) *Shall we again...*: As seen before (v. 9:2), already done, for many Israelite men had already taken local wives from when the first group of exiles came back to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Joshua in 537 BC. And now it was the 458 BC. *Leaving us no remnant*: They were the remnant and now worthy of punishment.

(9:15) *We are... a remnant*: Yahweh had always promised that a remnant would be left to reconstitute His people, giving continuity to His promises. And so a way had to be found for forgiving this unfaithful remnant, because now, in Yahweh's plan, the time had arrived to reconstruct His Temple and the city of Jerusalem.

The people's confession of sin (10:1-17)

(10:1) While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the House of Yahweh, a large crowd of Israelites -men, women and children- gathered around him. They too wept bitterly.

(10:2) Then Shecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to Yahweh by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. **(10:3)** Now let us make a covenant before Yahweh to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord

and of those who fear the commands of [Yahweh] our God. Let it be done according to the Law. **(10:4)** Rise up; this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it."

(10:5) So Ezra rose up and put the leading priests and Levites and all Israel under oath to do what had been suggested. And they took the oath.

(10:6) Then Ezra withdrew from before the House of Yahweh and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.

(10:7) A proclamation was then issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem for all the exiles to assemble in Jerusalem. **(10:8)** Anyone who failed to appear within three days would forfeit all his property, in accordance with the decision of the officials and elders, and would himself be expelled from the assembly of the exiles.

(10:9) Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people were sitting in the square before the House of Yahweh, greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain. **(10:10)** Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful; you have married foreign women, adding to Israel's guilt. **(10:11)** Now make confession to Yahweh, the God of your fathers, and do His will. Separate yourself from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives."

(10:12) The whole assembly responded with a loud voice: "You are right! We must do as you say. **(10:13)** But there are many people here and it is the rainy season; so we cannot stand outside. Besides, this matter cannot be taken care of in a day or two, because we are many to have sinned in this thing.

(10:14) Let our officials act for the whole assembly. Then let everyone in our town who has married a foreign woman come at a set time, before the elders and judges of each town, until the fierce anger of [Yahweh] our God in this matter is turned away from us." **(10:15)** Only Jonathan son of Asahel and Jahzeiah son of Tikvah, supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite, opposed this.

(10:16) So the exiles did as was proposed. Ezra the priest selected men who were family heads, one from each family division, and all of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to investigate the cases, **(10:17)** and by the first day of the first month they finished dealing with all the men who had married foreign women.

(10:1) *Ezra was... weeping:* In a formal way, that is, not privately and si-

lently but publicly and aloud. *Throwing himself down*: Another formal way to express his shame and to attract the people's attention.

(10:2) *Then Shecaniah... said...*: Ezra, wisely, waited for his audience to draw their own conclusions and to come out with a proposal about what should be done.

(10:3) *Now... Let it be done according to the Law*: According with Yahweh's command not to intermarry with the pagans. *Send away...*: Clearly, after two thousand years of Christian ideas and concepts, we find difficult to justify this action which, in our eyes, appears to be morally wrong. But the Christian morality, at that time, was still far away and, furthermore, it was absolutely necessary to eliminate the idolatrous influence of the pagan wives. *Women and their children*: According to the Persian law, the children had to go with their mother when marriage was dissolved.

(10:4) *Rise up; this matter is in your hands*: So the Israelites recognized their guilt and gave Ezra full authority for the solution of the problem.

(10:5) *Ezra rose up...*: In this way demonstrating his approval for the solution of the problem (sending away the pagan wives and their children) and his acceptance of being in charge of its implementation.

(10:6) *Then Ezra withdrew... ate no food and drank no water*: This way giving a clear, public sign of the urgency of the matter.

(10:7-8) *A proclamation was then issued*: Ezra had the authority of sending out a proclamation with threat of punishment because of the edict of the king (vv. 7:25-26). *Within three days*: Quickly, because Ezra was fasting. Anyway, since the territory of Judah had been much reduced, the most distant people would not be more than 50 miles from Jerusalem.

(10:9) *Within the three days, all the men... had gathered*: In the outer court of the Temple. *Judah and Benjamin*: The two main tribes of the Kingdom of Judah, which the Babylonians had exiled. *Twentieth day of the ninth month*: December 19, 458 BC. *The rain*: The Hebrew for this word is a plural of intensity, indicating torrential rain. The ninth month, Kislev (November-December), is in the middle of the rainy season, which begins in October and lasts to mid-April.

(10:10) *Adding to Israel's guilt*: By marrying pagan women the returnees added their sins to those of their ancestors.

(10:11) *Make confession... Separate...*: Now, after their proposal (vv. 10:2-3), the acceptance of it by Ezra (vv. 10:5-6), and the general assembly of all men, Ezra makes official the decision: total separation of the Israelites from the pagans.

(10:12-14) *This matter cannot be taken care in a day or two. Let...*: Logical steps for the implementation of such a serious decision. Obviously the

problem was widespread and could not be settled in a few days. *Let... who has married a foreign woman...:* The suggestion that each man who had married a foreign woman should appear in front of the elders and judges of his hometown was good and appropriate because they, knowing the people, would surely know whether the women involved were worshippers of Yahweh or were still involved in pagan worship. In effect the Law allowed an Israelite to marry a foreign woman if she had become Jewish in faith.

(10:15) *Only...:* Four men decided not to accept this decision and, clearly, were not considered Israelites any more.

(10:16-17) *The first day of the tenth month... the first day of the first month:* In just 11 days the officials began the investigation and completed it in three months (December 29, 458 BC - March 27, 457 BC), finding that about 110 men had pagan wives (vv. 10:18-43).

Those guilty of intermarriage

(10:18) Among the descendants of the priests, the following had married foreign women:

From the descendants of Joshua son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib and Gedaliah **(10:19)** (They all gave their hands in pledge to put away their wives, and for their guilt they each presented a ram from the flock as a guilt offering); **(10:20)** from the descendants of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah; **(10:21)** from the descendants of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jeheiel and Uziah; **(10:22)** from the descendants of Pa-shhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad and Elasah.

(10:23) Among the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah and Eliezer.

(10:24) From the singers: Eliashib.

From the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem and Uri.

(10:25) And among the other Israelites: from the descendants of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah and Benaiah; **(10:26)** from the descendants of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth and Elijah; **(10:27)** from the descendants of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mat-taniah, Jeremoth, Zabad and Aziza; **(10:28)** From the descendants of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai and Athlai; **(10:29)** from the descendants of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal and Jeremoth; **(10:30)** from the descendants of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui and Manasseh; **(10:31)** from the descendants of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, **(10:32)** Benjamin, Malluch and Shemariah; **(10:33)** from the descendants

of Hashum: Matte-nai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh and Shimei; **(10:34)** from the descendants of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, **(10:35)** Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, **(10:36)** Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, **(10:37)** Mattaniah, Mattenai and Jaasu; **(10:38)** from the descendants of Bin-nui: Shimei, **(10:39)** Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiyah, **(10:40)** Macnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, **(10:41)** Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, **(10:42)** Shallum, Amariah and Joseph; **(10:43)** from the descendants of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel and Benaiah.

(10:44) All these had married foreign women, and some of them had children by these wives.

(10:18-43) *Among the descendants of...:* By analyzing this list, it is interesting to note that the lower classes had sinned substantially less than the upper classes. In effect, only one singer and three gatekeepers had still pagan wives; no Temple servant or descendant of Solomon's servants had sinned in this way.

(10:44) *Married foreign women:* Who were still pagan. In effect the Law allowed an Israelite to marry a foreign woman if she had become Jewish in faith. *Some of them had children:* According to the Persian law, the children had to go with their mother when marriage was dissolved.

The Book of Nehemiah, a prophet of Yahweh

Author

Nothing is known about Nehemiah's background except that his father's name was Hacaliah (v. 1:1) and that he had a brother named Hanani (v. 1:2). Most probably his great-grandparents were taken into captivity when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC. And Nehemiah was probably born in Persia, where he had risen to a position of prominence in king Artaxerxes court, as the cupbearer of the king. This important position gives an insight into Nehemiah's character. A mighty monarch as Artaxerxes would only select for that position a man really wise, discreet, honest and above all trustworthy.

Dates

In 445 BC, 14 years after Ezra's return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah also returned and Yahweh used him to guide His people in rebuilding Jerusalem's walls and in reordering the people's social and economic organization.

Nehemiah probably wrote his book soon after all its events were completed. This means that the book was written about 430 BC or shortly thereafter.

Purpose

Nehemiah's book is an accurate -mostly administrative- report, actually a first-person account, of the facts and circumstances surrounding his return to Jerusalem

The book of Nehemiah

Nehemiah's prayer (1:1-11)

(1:1) The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah:

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, **(1:2)** Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

(1:3) They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

(1:4) When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before [Yahweh] the God of heaven. **(1:5)** Then I said:

"O Yahweh, God of heaven, great and awesome, Who keeps His covenant of affection with those who are fond of Him and obey His commands, **(1:6)** let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer Your

servant is praying before You day and night for Your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against You. **(1:7)** We have not obeyed the commands You gave Your servant Moses.

(1:8) Remember the instructions You gave Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, **(1:9)** but if you return to Me and obey My commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for My Name.'

(1:10) They are Your servants and Your people, whom You redeemed by Your great strength and Your mighty hand. **(1:11)** O Yahweh, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of this Your servant and to the prayers of Your servants who delight in revering Your Name. Give Your servant success today by granting him Your favor in the presence of this man."

I was cupbearer to the king.

(1:1) *The words of... son of...:* Nehemiah is introducing himself and his family and declaring to be the author of the book. *Month of Kislev:* November-December. *Twentieth year:* 446 BC, the twentieth year of Artaxerxes' reign (The Persian year begun in September-October, not in March-April as the Jewish one). *Susa:* A Babylonian city, where there was the Persian winter palace.

(1:2) *Hanani:* Clearly, at that time, this brother of Nehemiah was already living in Jerusalem. *Jewish remnant:* Yahweh had often declared that, in spite of the due punishment, there would always be a group of people faithful to Him (the remnant) by whom He would reconstruct the nation.

(1:3) *Those... who are back:* The exiles who had returned with Zerubbabel in 537 BC and with Ezra in 458 BC. *The province:* Judah, that is, the whole of Israel. *The wall of Jerusalem is broken down:* The lack of a strong city wall meant that the people were defenseless against their enemies. *Gates burned with fire:* By the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC.

(1:4) *I sat down and wept:* Nehemiah's distress was caused both by Nebuchadnezzar's destruction in 586 BC and, much more, by the fact that the earlier attempts to rebuild the walls had been stopped by king Artaxerxes after the protests of Rehum and Shimshai (Ezra vv. 4:21-23). *I mourned and fasted and prayed:* During the exile, fasting accompanied by mourning and praying had become a common practice, including solemn fast to commemorate the fall of Jerusalem.

(1:5) *Yahweh... Who keeps His covenant of affection with those who are fond of Him and obey His commands:* This phrase contains the total essen-

ce of the pact Yahweh-Israel: Yahweh's protection (affection) was only for those who respected His commands (to be fond of Him was to obey His commands).

(1:6-7) *I confess the sins we Israelites, including...*: This identification of a leader with the whole population and the lack of a real concept of individuality is a characteristic of the Old Testament.

(1:8-9) *If you are... I will.... but if you... I will...*: In this phrase we can see a summary of Israel's history: So many times, after enjoying the favor of Yahweh, they forgot Him, losing His protection. And when they understood their fault and repented, Yahweh came back to them and allowed them (actually, the "faithful remnant") to return and live in Jerusalem (the dwelling of Yahweh's Name).

(1:10) *Your people, whom You redeemed*: Also they had sinned and failed, they were still Yahweh's chosen people, redeemed by Him only because of His will.

(1:11) *Give Your servant success... in the presence of this man*: Humanly speaking, only one person could make it possible for Nehemiah to help the Jews in Jerusalem -the king he served. Years earlier Artaxerxes had issued a decree to stop the rebuilding work in Jerusalem (Ezra 4:21), and he was the only one who could reverse that order. *Cupbearer*: One of the cupbearer's duties was to choose and test the king's wine to make certain that it was not poisoned. Thus Nehemiah had to be a man who enjoyed the unre-served confidence of the king.

Artaxerxes sends Nehemiah to Jerusalem (2:1-10)

(2:1) In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of king Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; **(2:2)** so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart."

I was very much afraid, **(2:3)** but I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?"

(2:4) Then the king said to me, "What is it you want?"

Then I prayed to [Yahweh] the God of heaven, **(2:5)** and answered the king, "If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it."

(2:6) Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, "How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?" It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

(2:7) I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conducts until I arrive in Judah? **(2:8)** And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the Temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" And because the gracious hand of [Yahweh] my God was upon me, the king granted my requests. **(2:9)** So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king had also sent army officers and cavalry with me.

(2:10) When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.

(2:1) *Month of Nisan... twentieth year:* March-April 445 BC, four months after Nehemiah had been informed by his brother Hanani about the condition of Jerusalem's walls. Even though Nehemiah was a favorite of the king, he had to wait for the right moment and the proper occasion for asking anything to the king. *Sad in his presence:* A dangerous situation for, no matter what one's personal problems were, the king's servants were expected to keep their feelings to themselves and to display a cheerful disposition before him.

(2:2) *The king asked me...:* Clearly, Nehemiah knew that this was the right moment to bring his problems before the king.

(2:3) *May the king live for ever!:* A common form of address to kings. *The city where my fathers are buried:* Nehemiah did not mention Jerusalem by name; he preferred to begin by arousing the king's sympathy by stressing first the desecration of ancestral tombs.

(2:4-5) *Then I prayed... and I answered the king...:* Before asking for the king's favor, Nehemiah asked for Yahweh's help.

(2:6) *The queen:* The name of Artaxerxes' queen was Damaspia. To note that the Persian court was notorious for the great influence exercised by the royal women. Especially domineering was Amestris, wife of Xerxes and mother of Artaxerxes. *How long...?:* Nehemiah probably asked for only a brief leave of absence. But, in effect, he spent 12 years on his first term as governor of Judah (v. 5:14). In the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, Nehemiah returned to report to the king and then came back to Judah for a second term of unknown duration (vv. 13:6-7).

(2:7) *Letters to the governors:* To officialize Nehemiah's role, position and degree of authority, as Nehemiah knew he would have to face many enemies.

(2:8) *Gates of the citadel:* Of the fortress north of the Temple, the forerunner of the Antonia fortress built by Herod the Great. *The gracious hand of Yahweh... was upon me:* Though Nehemiah had prepared diligently for the proper moment to ask for the king's favor, he knew that ultimately his success would depend on Yahweh's help.

(2:9) *Army officers and cavalry:* Nehemiah was accompanied by an armed escort since he was officially Judah's governor.

(2:10) *Sanballat:* The main political opponent of Nehemiah. He held the position of governor of Samaria. *Tobiah:* The governor of Transjordan under the Persians. *They were much disturbed:* For political, not for religious reasons, for Nehemiah's arrival and authority threatened theirs.

Nehemiah inspects Jerusalem's wall (2:11-20)

(2:11) I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days **(2:12)** I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone of what [Yahweh] my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

(2:13) By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the wall of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. **(2:14)** Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; **(2:15)** so I went up to the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. **(2:16)** The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

(2:17) Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." **(2:18)** I also told them about the gracious hand of [Yahweh] my God upon me and what the king had said to me.

They replied, "Let us start the rebuilding." So they began this good work.

(2:19) But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. "What is this you are doing?" They asked. "Are you rebelling against the king?"

(2:20) I answered them by saying, "[Yahweh] the God of heaven will give us success. We His servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it."

(2:11) *I went to Jerusalem:* In August 445 BC, two months before the re-

building of the wall (v. 6:15). *Staying... three days*: Some rest was necessary after a journey of many hundreds of miles by land.

(2:12-15) *I set out during the night... examining the wall...*: Knowing of the enemies -Samaritans and others- there around, Nehemiah was cautious and discreet when he began inspecting the condition of the city's fortifications. *I went through... toward...*: Nehemiah did not make a complete circuit of the wall, but only of the southern area. Jerusalem was always attacked from the north because it was most vulnerable there, so the wall had probably been completely destroyed in that part of the city. *Valley Gate, Jackal Well, Dung Gate, Fountain Gate, King's Pool*: Reference points well known to all Israelites.

(2:16) *The officials did not know*: Nehemiah himself had, first of all, to understand the extent of the necessary rebuilding work.

(2:17) *Then I said...*: Only after understanding the actual situation Nehemiah could properly organize the work. *Jerusalem lies in ruin*: "In ruin" describes the actual, very poor, condition of the wall and of most parts of the city itself, in spite of the attempts done by the returnees to rebuild them. The Jews living there had evidently become accustomed to this sad state of the town. It took an outsider to assess the situation and to convince them to re-start with renewed efforts.

(2:18) *[Yahweh]... and... the king...*: Nehemiah could personally attest that Yahweh was active in his behalf and that he had come with full royal sanction and authority.

(2:19) *Sanballat, Tobiah*: Nehemiah's two main political enemies (v. 2:10). *Geshem the Arab*: He was the governor in charge of a north Arabian confederacy that controlled vast areas from northeast Egypt to northern Arabia and southern Palestine. Geshem may have feared that the development of an independent Jewish nation might interfere with his lucrative spice trade.

(2:20) *[Yahweh]... will give us success. You have no share...*: Nehemiah's strength came first from Yahweh's protection and only then from the authority received from king Artaxerxes.

Builders of the wall (3:1-32)

(3:1) Eliashib the high priest and his fellows priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the tower of Hananel. **(3:2)** The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them.

(3:3) The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassennah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. **(3:4)** Meremoth son of

Uriah, the son of Akkoz, repaired the next section. Next to him Meshullam son of Berekiah, the son of Meshezabel, made repairs, and next to him Zadok son of Baana also made repairs. **(3:5)** The next section was repaired by the men of Teoka, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work.

(3:6) The Jeshanah Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. **(3:7)** Next to them, repairs were made by men from Gibeon and Mizpah -Melatiah of Gibeon and Jadon of Meronoth- places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates. **(3:8)** Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that. They restored [the wall of] Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. **(3:9)** Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section. **(3:10)** Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him. **(3:11)** Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pathath-Moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. **(3:12)** Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section with the help of his daughters.

(3:13) The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the residents of Zanoah. They rebuilt it and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. They also repaired a thousand cubits of the wall as far as the Dung Gate.

(3:14) The Dung Gate was repaired by Malkijah son of Recab, ruler of the district of Beth Hakkerem. He rebuilt it and put its doors and bolts and bars in place.

(3:15) The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallum son of Col-Hozeh, ruler of the district of Mizpah. He rebuilt it, roofing it over, putting its doors and bolts and bars in place. He also repaired the wall of the Pool of Siloam, by the King's Garden, as far as the steps going down from the City of David. **(3:16)** Beyond him, Nehemiah son of Azbuk, ruler of a half-district of Beth-Zur, made repairs up to a point opposite the Tomb of David, as far as the Artificial Pool and the House of the Heroes.

(3:17) Next to him, the repairs were made by the Levites under Rehum son of Bani. Beside him, Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district. **(3:18)** Next to him, the repairs were made by the countrymen under Binnui son of Henadah, ruler of the other half-district of Keilah. **(3:19)** Next to him, Ezer son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, repaired another section, from a point facing the Ascent to the Armory as far as the angle.

(3:20) Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section, from the angle to the entrance of the house of Eliashib the high priest.

(3:21) Next to him, Meremoth son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz, repaired another section, from the entrance of Eliashib's house to the end of it.

(3:22) The repairs next to him were made by the priests from the surrounding region. **(3:23)** Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house; and next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house. **(3:24)** Next to him, Binnui son of Henadah repaired another section, from Azariah's house to the angle, that is, the corner, **(3:25)** and Palal son of Uzai worked opposite the angle and the upper tower projecting from the palace near the court of the guard. Next to him, Pedaiiah son of Parosh **(3:26)** and the Temple servants living on the hill of Ophel made repairs up to a point opposite the Water Gate toward the east and opposite the projecting tower. **(3:27)** Next to them, the men of Tekoa repaired another section, from the great projecting tower to the wall [of the hill] of Ophel.

(3:28) Above the Horse Gate, the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house. **(3:29)** Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house. Next to him, Shemaiah son of Shecaniah, the guard at the East Gate, made repairs. **(3:30)** Next to him, Hananiah son of Shelemiah, and Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another section. Next to them, Meshullam son of Berekiah made repairs opposite his living quarters. **(3:31)** Next to him, Malkijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the houses of the Temple servants and the merchants, opposite the Inspection Gate, and as far as the room above the corner; **(3:32)** and between the room above the corner and the Sheep Gate the goldsmiths and merchants made repairs.

(3:1-32) *Builders of the wall:* The task of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, especially under those adverse conditions, required a huge organizational effort -which comes out evident from this chapter. Nehemiah assigned everyone a specific place to work, and most of the assignments were made near the people's houses. The reasons for this are obvious. First, people who were assigned to sections of the wall near their homes would be more personally involved and consequently more highly motivated. Second, they would not have to travel to another part of the city to do the job, wasting time. Third, in case of attack they would not be tempted to leave their posts, but would stay and protect their families.

Commuters also had a part. Men whose homes were outside of Jerusalem (in Jerico, Tekoa, Gibeon and Mizpah) were assigned to sections of the

wall where there were few homes. Those workers were asked to complete sections that would be not so convenient for the permanent residents of Jerusalem.

Assignments were also made by vocation. For example, the high priest and his brothers were assigned to rebuild the Sheep Gate, which was of particular interest to them, because the animals destined to sacrifice were brought to the Temple through that gate.

From another point of view, this is one of the most important chapters in the Old Testament for determining the topography of Jerusalem. The narrative begins at the Sheep Gate (northeast corner of the city) and proceeds counterclockwise around the wall. About 40 key men are named as participants in the reconstruction of about 45 sections. The towns listed as the hometowns of the builders were the administrative centers of the province of Judah. To note that not all the sections of the wall were in the same state of disrepair.

(3:13) *Thousand cubits:* About 500 yards.

Opposition to the rebuilding (4:1-23)

(4:1) When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, **(4:2)** and in presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble -burned as they are?"

(4:3) Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building -if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!"

(4:4) Hear us, O [Yahweh] our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder, [slaves] in a land of captivity. **(4:5)** Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sin from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.

(4:6) So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its high, for the people worked with all their heart.

(4:7) But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's wall had gone ahead and that the gaps were been closed, they were very angry. **(4:8)** They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. **(4:9)** But we prayed to [Yahweh] our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

(4:10) Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."

(4:11) Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."

(4:12) Because the Jews who lived near them had come and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

(4:13) Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. **(4:14)** After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember Yahweh, Who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

(4:15) When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that Yahweh had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work.

(4:16) From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah. **(4:17)** Those who were building the wall and those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other. **(4:18)** And each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.

(4:19) Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. **(4:20)** Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. [Yahweh] our God will fight for us!"

(4:21) So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. **(4:22)** At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day." **(4:23)** Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each kept his weapon ready to hand.

(4:1-2) Sanballat... said...: Disputes between rival Persian governors were frequent. Sanballat asked several derisive questions to upset the Jews and to discourage them in their efforts. *Will they offer sacrifices?:* That is, could they possibly complete the walls so that they could then give sacrifices of thanksgiving? *Will they finish in a day?:* Meaning that they did not know what they were undertaking. *Stones... burned:* Fire had damaged the stones, which were probably limestone, and had caused many of them to crack and crumble.

(4:3) Tobiah... said...: Another derisive attempt to discourage the Jews, saying that they were so inept in their work that even a light animal as a fox would break the wall down by merely climbing up on it.

(4:4-5) *Hear us...*: As in the so called imprecatory psalms (Psalms 79:12; 83; 94:1-3; 109:14; 137:7-9), Nehemiah does not himself take action against his opponents but calls down on them Yahweh's punishment.

(4:6-8) *So we rebuilt... They all plotted...*: When they saw that the rebuilding activity was going on in spite of their menaces, the Israelites' enemies considered the possibility to stop the work by force.

(4:9) *We prayed... and posted a guard*: A proper blend of faith and action.

(4:10) *The people... giving out*: At that point, after working so hard, the builders were already physically exhausted. *So much rubble that...*: There was plenty of useless rubble that had to be taken away before completing the wall in all its height.

(4:11-12) *Our enemies said... The Jews who lived near them told us...*: Clearly, the enemy was continuing spreading unsettling rumors and menaces, and the Jews, knowing their numerical inferiority, were becoming discouraged.

(4:13) *Therefore I stationed...*: Nehemiah posted armed men conspicuously in the areas that were the most vulnerable along the wall.

(4:14-15) *Don't be afraid. Remember Yahweh*: As usual, the Jews had to be reminded that Yahweh was by their side, as the discovery of their enemies' plot demonstrated. In effect, when their enemies heard that their plot had been discovered, and that the Jews were ready to fight, they did not attack.

(4:16-20) *From that day on...*: By showing that they were armed and always ready for a fight, the Jews discouraged a physical action of their enemies. *The trumpet stayed with me. Wherever you hear... join us there*: To make sure to avoid false alarms and to have the possibility of calling for everybody's intervention in case of a real attack.

(4:21) *We continued the work... till the stars came out*: This indicates the earnestness of their efforts, since the usual time to stop working was at sunset.

(4:22) *Every man... stay inside Jerusalem*: Even those from outside Jerusalem stayed in the city at night so that some of them could serve as sentries. And, anyway, venturing outside Jerusalem at night would have been quite dangerous.

(4:23) *Neither I nor...*: The implication of this verse is that constant preparedness was the rule.

Nehemiah helps the poor (5:1-19)

(5:1) Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. **(5:2)** Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain."

(5:3) Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine."

(5:4) Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. **(5:5)** Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."

(5:6) When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. **(5:7)** I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!" So I called together a large meeting to deal with them **(5:8)** and said, "As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

(5:9) So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of [Yahweh] our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? **(5:10)** I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! **(5:11)** Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them -the percentage on the money, grain, new wine and oil."

(5:12) "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say."

Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and the officials to take an oath to do what they had promised. **(5:13)** I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, "In this way may Yahweh shake out of his house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. So may such a man be shaken out and emptied!"

At this the whole assembly said, "Amen," and praised Yahweh. And the people did as they had promised.

(5:14) Moreover, from the twentieth year of king Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year -for twelve years- neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. **(5:15)** But earlier the governors -those preceding me- placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for Yahweh I did not act like that. **(5:16)** Instead, I devoted myself to the work of this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

(5:17) Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. **(5:18)** Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands we-re heavy on these people.

(5:19) Remember me with favor O [Yahweh] my God, for all I have done for this people.

(5:1-19) During his major effort to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, Nehemiah had to face an economic crisis so serious that he had to call a general meeting in the midst of the rebuilding activity. His presence, that of a strong and honest leader, allowed the people to bring to light problems that had long been simmering and that had to be dealt with and solved before the work could proceed. From a general point of view, because of the work on the wall, they were not tending properly their crops. And this crop failure was so bad to have caused a famine and, as a consequence, an economic crisis. Among the classes affected by the economic crisis were: (1) the landless, who were totally short of money and food (v. 5:2) and didn't know how to keep themselves and their families alive; (2) the small landowners, who we-re compelled to mortgage their properties (v. 5:3) in order to buy food from others; (3) those who were forced to borrow money at exorbitant rates (v. 5:4) -from their rich Jewish brothers- to pay property taxes to king Artaxerxes. And this led to another problem because, to repay their creditors, they had to sell their children to slavery (v. 5:5).

(5:1) *The men and their wives...*: The situation was so serious that even the women joined in protest as they ran short of money and supplies to feed their families. They complained not against the foreign authorities but against their own countrymen who were taking advantage of their brothers in need even at a time when all were needed for the defense of Jerusalem.

(5:2) *We must get grain*: About six to seven bushels (220 to 257 metrical liters) would be needed to feed a four members family for a month.

(5:3) *We are mortgaging our...*: Even those who had some property were forced to mortgage it, benefiting the minority of the very wealthy. *Famine*: The political situation (Israel was a country under foreign domination) combined with the fact that most of them were working on the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall had produced not a simple shortage of food, but a famine.

(5:4) *King's tax*: Of the heavy taxes in gold coins that the Persian king collected from their subject populations, little remained to benefit the provin-

ces, because most of the coins were melted down and stored in Persia as bullions.

(5:5) Sons and daughters to slavery: In times of economic distress families would borrow money, first mortgaging their possessions, then using family members as collaterals. If a man could not repay the loan and its interests, his children, his wife, and even the man himself could be sold into bondage. An Israelite who fell into debt, however, would serve his creditor as a "hired worker" (Leviticus 25:39-40). And he was to be released in the seventh year (Deuteronomy 15:12-18), unless he chose to stay voluntarily.

(5:6) I was very angry: Realizing that the rich Israelites were oppressing their poor countrymen even more than the Persians.

(5:7-8) I called a large meeting: Nehemiah pointed out the inconsistencies of their behavior compared with what he and others in exile had done personally to help their brothers. *Usury:* Usury among Israelites was forbidden by the Law (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36; Deuteronomy 23:20). *Jewish brothers who were sold:* An impoverished Israelite could be hired as a servant, but he was not to be sold as a slave (Leviticus 25:39-42). *Sold to the Gentiles:* The sale of an Israelite as a slave was strictly forbidden. *You are selling... sold back to us:* And Nehemiah pointed to the absurdity of the situation: he was spending his own money to ransom from the Gentiles Jews sold into slavery by other Jews. *They kept quiet:* Their guilt was so obvious that they had no rebuttal or excuse.

(5:9-10) What you are doing is not right. Let the exacting of the usury stop!: After remembering the rich that they had to fear Yahweh's punishment, Nehemiah had to solve quickly this problem.

(5:11-12) Give back immediately...: Here Nehemiah, the governor appointed by the Persian king, gives his orders; orders nobody could object to, neither from a Jewish religious point of view nor from a political one. *Usury... the percentage:* The interest received from the loans was one percent a month or more. *We... will do as you say. I made... take an oath:* Not trusting too much their promises, Nehemiah obliged them to take an oath in the name of Yahweh, which was personally and socially absolutely binding (not to respect such an oath would cause religious excommunication and social outcasting).

(5:13) Shook out the folds of my robe: Symbolizing the solemnity of the oath and reinforcing the attendant curses for non fulfilling it.

(5:14) From the twentieth year... until his thirty-second: From 446-445 BC to 433-432 BC. Nehemiah served his first term as governor for 12 years before being recalled to court (v. 13:6), after which he returned to Jerusalem for a second term (v. 13:7) whose length cannot be determined. *Food allotted to the governor:* Provincial governors received, among others, a

food allowance. But Nehemiah made use of his personal resources for his necessities and those of his administration.

(5:15-18) *The earlier governors... Their assistants...:* The governors often used extortion and their assistants usually proved to be even more oppressive. *Forty shekels:* About one pound (450 gr). *I did not act like that:* Nehemiah's behavior as governor was guided by principles of service rather than by opportunism. *We did not acquire any land:* As governor, Nehemiah could have loaned people money to pay their taxes, having them use their land as collateral. And then, when they could not pay back what they had borrowed, he could have taken their land. But he came to Jerusalem to help the people, not to exploit them. He was there to serve Yahweh by rebuilding the wall and the town, not for personal interest. *Furthermore... ate at my table... I never demanded...:* As part of his social responsibilities, a governor was expected to entertain lavishly. And, in the case of Nehemiah, he never asked anything to his countrymen.

(5:19) *Remember me...:* A typical Jewish prayer, an invocation to Yahweh pointing to the good done to his fellow Jews.

Further opposition to the rebuilding (6:1-14)

(6:1) When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it -though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates- **(6:2)** Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages in the plain of Ono."

But they were scheming to harm me; **(6:3)** so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave and go down to you?" **(6:4)** Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

(6:5) Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter **(6:6)** in which was written:

"It is reported among the nations -and Geshem says it is true- that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king **(6:7)** and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: 'There is a king in Judah!' Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us confer together."

(6:8) I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head!"

(6:9) They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed."

But I prayed [Yahweh], "Now strengthen my hands."

(6:10) One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, "Let us meet in the House of Yahweh, in the Sanctuary, and let us close the Temple doors, because men are coming to kill you -by night they are coming to kill you."

(6:11) But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the Sanctuary to save his life? No, I will not go!" **(6:12)** I realized that Yahweh had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. **(6:13)** He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.

(6:14) Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O [Yahweh] my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Nohadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me.

(6:1) *Sanballat*: The main opponent of Nehemiah, the governor of Samaria. *Tobiah*: The governor of Transjordan. *Geshem the Arab*: The governor of a North Arabian confederacy, from northeast Egypt to northern Arabia and southern Palestine. They feared the development of an independent Jewish nation for political, not for religious reasons.

(6:2) *Plain of Ono*: Located about seven miles southeast of Joppa near Lod (modern Lydda), in the westernmost area settled by the returning Jews, near the border of Samaria, Sanballat's home province. Nehemiah immediately recognized the invitation as a trap.

(6:3-4) *I sent... this reply...*: Nehemiah's reply may seem unfit to an apparently reasonable invitation, but he had correctly discerned the insincerity of his enemies. *Four times*: Nehemiah's enemies were persistent, but so was he in resisting them.

(6:5) *Unsealed letter*: A letter was ordinarily written on a papyrus or a leather sheet, which was rolled up, tied with a string and sealed to guarantee the letter's authenticity. In this case, it is clear that Sanballat wanted the content of this letter to be made known to everybody.

(6:6-7) *About to become their king*: The Persian king did not tolerate the claims of pretenders to kingship, so this was a very dangerous accusation. *Appointed prophets*: True Jewish prophets were speaking in the name of Yahweh, but it was always possible to bribe some priest and to have him prophecy falsely.

(6:8) *Nothing like what...*: Nehemiah was not intimidated, and called the report a lie and Sanballat a liar. Of course, he surely sent his own messenger to the Persian king to assure him of his loyalty.

(6:9) *Hands will get... weak:* Figurative language to express the idea of discouragement. *But I prayed...:* Nehemiah asked Yahweh to make he and all his men strong in front of their enemies.

(6:10) *Shemaiah... was shut in:* A symbolic action to indicate that his own life was in danger and to suggest that both Nehemiah and he must flee to the Sanctuary of the Temple. He was a priest (as demonstrated by him having access to the Temple), was paid by Tobiah (v. 6:12) and therefore was Nehemiah's enemy.

(6:11) *Should a man like me...:* Even if the threat against his life was real, Nehemiah, who was not a coward, would not run into hiding. Nor would he transgress the Law to save his life; for, as a layman, he was not permitted to enter the "House of Yahweh," that is, the inner part of the Temple.

(6:12) *Yahweh had not sent him... Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him:* The fact that Shemaiah had proposed a course of action contrary to Yahweh's Law had revealed him as a false prophet.

(6:13) *A sin by doing this, and... discredit me:* If Nehemiah had wavered in the face of the threat and taken refuge in the Temple, he would have committed a sin before Yahweh and would have been discredited as a leader and the morale of the people would have plummeted.

(6:14) *Remember...:* In classical Old testament style, Nehemiah asked Yahweh to provide for the appropriate punishment of Israel's enemies. *Prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets...:* Clearly, Shemaiah (v. 6:10) was not the only false prophet bribed by Nehemiah's political enemies.

The completion of the wall (6:15-19; 7:1-3)

(6:15) The wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. **(6:16)** When all our enemies heard about this all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of [Yahweh] our God.

(6:17) Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. **(6:18)** For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shecaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. **(6:19)** Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me.

(7:1) After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed. **(7:2)** I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared Yahweh more than most men do. **(7:3)** I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem are

not to be open until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty have them shut the doors and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, [to be stationed] some at their posts and some near their own houses."

(6:15-16) *Twenty-fifth of Elul: October 2, 445 BC. Fifty-two days:* The wall that lay in ruin for nearly one century and a half was crudely rebuilt in less than two months. Archaeological investigations have shown that the circumference of the wall in Nehemiah's days was much reduced. The historian Josephus states that the rebuilding of the larger wall took two years and four months (Antiquities 11.5.8).

(6:17-19) *The nobles of Judah... Tobiah:* Tobiah was related to an influential family in Judah, since his son Jehohanan was married to the daughter of Meshullam, who had helped repair two sections of the wall of Jerusalem (vv. 3:4,30). *Reporting... his good deeds:* Clearly, Tobiah's relatives living in Jerusalem were trying to reconcile him to Nehemiah.

(7:1) *Gatekeepers... singers... Levites were appointed:* At the completion of the rebuilding work, it was necessary to reinstate the proper social and religious organization.

(7:2) *In charge of Jerusalem... Hanani:* Appointed to the top civil charge, over Repahia and Shallun who were over the two half-districts of the city (vv. 3:9,12). *Hananiah the commander:* Appointed to the top military charge.

(7:3) *The gates...:* Normally the gates would be opened at dawn and closed at sunset, but their opening was to be delayed until the sun was high in order to prevent the enemy from making a surprise attack before most of the people were up. And their closure was to be anticipated to make sure no enemy could enter taking advantage of the twilight. *Appoint... guards:* Jerusalem's enemies were many, and so it was necessary to be in constant alert, during the day and, much more, at night.

The list of the exiles who returned (7:4-73)

(7:4) Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. **(7:5)** So [Yahweh] my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families. I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return. This is what I found written there:

(7:6) These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylonia had taken captive (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town, **(7:7)** in

company with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum and Baanah):

The list of the men of Israel:

(7:8) The descendants of Parosh: 2,172; **(7:9)** of Shephatiah: 372; **(7:10)** of Arah: 652; **(7:11)** of Pahath-Moab (through the line of Joshua and Joab): 2,818; **(7:12)** of Elam: 1,254; **(7:13)** of Zattu: 845; **(7:14)** of Zaccai: 760; **(7:15)** of Bani: 648; **(7:16)** of Bebai: 628; **(7:17)** of Azgad: 2,322; **(7:18)** of Adonikam: 667; **(7:19)** of Bigvai: 2,067; **(7:20)** of Adin: 655; **(7:21)** of Ater (through Hezekiah): 98; **(7:22)** of Hashum: 328; **(7:23)** of Bezai: 324; **(7:24)** of Hariph (Jorah): 112; **(7:25)** of Gibeon (Gibbar): 95.

(7:26) The men of Bethlehem and Netophah: 188; **(7:27)** of Anathoth: 128; **(7:28)** of Beth Azmaveth: 42; **(7:29)** of Kiriath Jearim, Kephirah and Beeroth: 743; **(7:30)** of Ramah and Geba: 621; **(7:31)** of Micmash: 122; **(7:32)** of Bethel and Ai: 123; **(7:33)** of the other Nebo: 52; **(7:34)** of the other Elam: 1,254; **(7:35)** of Harim: 320; **(7:36)** of Jericho: 345; **(7:37)** of Lod, Hadid and Ono: 721; **(7:38)** of Senaah: 3,930.

(7:39) The priests: the descendants of Jedaiah (through the family of Joshua): 973; **(7:40)** of Immer: 1,052; **(7:41)** of Pashur: 1,247; **(7:42)** of Harim: 1,017.

(7:43) The Levites: the descendants of Joshua (through Kadmiel and through the line of Hodaviah): 74.

(7:44) The singers: the descendants of Asaph: 148.

(7:45) The gatekeepers: the descendants of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita and Shobai: 138.

(7:46) The Temple servants: the descendants of Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbath, **(7:47)** Keros, Siaha (Sia), Padon, **(7:48)** Lebanah (Lebana), Hagabah (Hagaba), Shalmi, **(7:49)** Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, **(7:50)** Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, **(7:51)** Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah, **(7:52)** Besai, Meunim, Nephussim, **(7:53)** Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harthur, **(7:54)** Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, **(7:55)** Barkos, Sisera, Temah, **(7:56)** Neziah and Hatipha.

(7:57) The descendants of the servants of Solomon: the descendants of Sotai, Sophereth (Hassophereth), Perida (Peruda), **(7:58)** Jaala, Darkon, Giddel, **(7:59)** Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim and Amon (Ami).

(7:60) The Temple servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon: 392.

(7:61) The following came up from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon and Immer, but they could not show that their families were descendants from Israel: **(7:62)** the descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah and Nekoda: 642. **(7:63)** And from among the priests: the descendants of Hobaiah, Hakkoz and Barzillai (a man who had married a daughter of Barzil-

lai the Gileadite and was called by that name). **(7:64)** These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. **(7:65)** The governor, therefore, ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there should be a priest ministering with the Urim and Thummim.

(7:66) The whole company numbered 42,360, **(7:67)** besides their 7,337 menservants and maidservants; and they also had 245 men and women singers. **(7:68)** There were 736 horses, 245 mules, **(7:69)** 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys.

(7:70) Some of the heads of the families offered contributions for the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 drachmas of gold, 50 bowls and 530 garments for priests. **(7:71)** Some of the heads of the families gave to the treasury for the work 20,000 drachmas of gold and 2,200 minas of silver. **(7:72)** The total given by the rest of the people was 20,000 drachmas of gold, 2,000 minas of silver and 67 garments for priests.

(7:73) The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers and the Temple servants, along with certain of the people and the rest of the Israelites, settled in their own towns.

(7:4-6) Few people: Comparatively few people were residing in Jerusalem, and Nehemiah decided to repopulate it with people of pure Jewish descent. *Genealogical record of... the first to return:* The list of the exiles returned with Zerubbabel in 537 BC reported in this chapter corresponds quite well to the list in Ezra 2:1-70. The list of localities indicates that the people retained the memories of their homes and that exiles from a wide background of tribes, villages and towns had returned. To note that, in comparing this list with that in Ezra 2, there are some differences in the names and numbers reported -about 20% of the numbers are not the same in Nehemiah and Ezra. But most of these differences may be explained by the notation used for units (vertical strokes) and for tens (horizontal strokes) which led to copying errors. *Province:* Judah, that is, the whole Israel.

(7:7) Zerubbabel: He was the legitimate heir to the throne of David, because he was the grandson of king Jehoiachin taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon in 586 BC. *Joshua:* His father, Jehozadak had been the high priest taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and deported to Babylon in 586 BC. *Nehemiah:* Not the prophet of the book by that name. *Azariag... Baanah:* Other -unknown- important Jews.

(7:8-25) A list of names, organized by family (clan).

(7:26-38) A list of villages and towns, many of which were in Benjamite territory north of Jerusalem. It is significant that there are no references to

towns in the Negev, south of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar overran Judah in 597 BC, the Edomites took advantage of the situation and occupied that area.

(7:39-42) Priests: Four clans of priests.

(7:43) Levites...74: A relatively small number of Levites. Since the Levites had been entrusted with the menial tasks of the Temple service, many of them may have found a more comfortable way of life in exile and decided to remain in Babylon.

(7:44) Singers... Asaph: Asaph was one of the three Levites appointed by David over the Temple singers.

(7:45) Gatekeepers: Usually Levites. Their primary function was to tend the doors and gates of the Temple and to perform other menial tasks.

(7:46-60) Temple servants... Servants of Solomon...: Probably the descendants of the Canaanites enslaved by Solomon.

(7:61-65) Towns of...: Places in Mesopotamia along the Kebar River where the Jews were settled by their Babylonian captors. The Jews had been settled in cities that had previously been depopulated by the Babylonians. *Governor:* Zerubbabel. *A priest... with the Urim and Thummim:* They were sacred lots and were often used in times of crises to determine the will of Yahweh. Urim ("curses") meant "no" and Thummim ("perfections") meant "yes."

(7:66-69) 42,360: To note that Nehemiah's total does not correspond with the numbers given: 25,406 (men of Israel) + 4,289 (priests) + 360 (Levites, singers, gatekeepers) + 392 (temple servants, descendants of Solomon's servants) + 642 (men of unproven origin) + 7,337 (men- and maidservants) + 245 (men and women singers) = 38,671. This difference may be explained by the notation used for units (vertical strokes) and for tens (horizontal strokes) which led to copying errors. *Menservants and maidservants:* The fact that so many servants (slaves) chose to follow their masters is indicative of the benevolent treatment of servants by the Jews. *Men and women singers:* Secular singers who sang at social events such as weddings and funerals, distinct from the Temple singers who were all male.

(7:70-72) Contributions: Here, in Nehemiah, the personal contributions come from the heads of the families, the governor and the rest of the people, while on the parallel passage of Ezra (Ezra vv. 2:68-69) they come from the heads of the families only. *1,000 drachmas:* That is, about 12.5 pounds (about 6 kilograms). *20,000 drachmas:* That is, 250 pounds (about 120 kilograms). *2,200 minas:* That is, about 1.3 tons. *2,000 minas:* That is, about 1.2 tons.

(7:73) *Settled in their own towns:* Not in Jerusalem. Later, Nehemiah (vv. 11:1-2) will move some of those people by lot to reinforce the population of Jerusalem.

Ezra reads the Law (8:1-18)

(8:1) When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which Yahweh had commanded for Israel.

(8:2) So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. **(8:3)** He read it aloud from day break till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

(8:4) Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.

(8:5) Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. **(8:6)** Ezra praised Yahweh, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped Yahweh with their faces to the ground.

(8:7) The Levites -Joshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah- instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. **(8:8)** They read [parts] of the Book of the Law of Yahweh, making them clear and giving their meaning so the people could understand what was being read.

(8:9) Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to Yahweh your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

(8:10) Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This is sacred to Yahweh our God. Do not grieve, for the joy of Yahweh is your strength."

(8:11) The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve."

(8:12) Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of

food to the poor and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the [meaning of the] words that had been read to them.

(8:13) On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law. **(8:14)** They found written in the Law, which Yahweh had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month **(8:15)** and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: "Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make booths." So it is written.

(8:16) So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves booths on their own roof, in their courtyards, in the courts of the House of Yahweh and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. **(8:17)** The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated [that feast] like this. And their joy was great.

(8:18) Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of Yahweh. They celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

(8:1) *Seventh month:* Tishri (September-October 445 BC), one of the most sacred months of the Jewish calendar. *Ezra... The Book of the Law of Moses:* Ezra was a teacher, well versed in the Law of Moses (the Torah, that is, the entire Pentateuch), and had been commissioned to teach the Law (Ezra 7:25) to the returnees.

(8:2) *First day of the seventh month:* October 4, 445 BC, the first day of the Feast of Trumpets, celebrated with cessation from work and a sacred assembly. *Men and women and all...:* Women and children did not usually participate in assemblies but, on such a solemn occasion, even the women, together with the older children, did participate.

(8:3) *Read it aloud from daybreak till noon:* The Pentateuch was written in ancient Hebrew and surely few people were able to understand it. So, after few verses were read, they had to be translated for all to understand.

(8:4-5) *Ezra the scribe stood on a high... Beside him... stood...:* So that everybody could see and hear the main reader (Ezra) and the translators-commentators (all those staying on the platform with Ezra). *Ezra opened the book... the people all stood up:* Everybody was standing during Ezra's reading (not so during the longer translations and explanations).

(8:6) *Ezra praised Yahweh...*: At the beginning of the reading the usual acts of communal worshipping were executed.

(8:7-8) *The Levites... instructed... making it clear*: After Ezra's reading in Hebrew and the relevant translation, the Levites were explaining the meaning of the verses that had been read.

(8:9-10) *Do not mourn or weep*: It was a time for rejoicing (Jerusalem wall was rebuilt, the city was again inhabited by the Jews) and not to be sad for whatever other reason. *Choice food*: Usually the fat of sacrificed animals was offered to Yahweh as the tastier part of the offering and it was not to be eaten. In this special occasion the festive food was prepared with much of the sacrificed animals' fat. *Send some to those who have nothing*: It was customary to remember the less fortunate (who could not afford to sacrifice more than some pigeons) on joyous occasions.

(8:11-12) *The Levites...*: Practically a repetition of the previous verses.

(8:13-15) *On the second day... they found written...*: Surprisingly, all those people had lost knowledge of substantial parts of their most sacred books. *To live in booths during the feast of the seventh month*: During this feast, the "Feast of the Tabernacles" or "Boots," the Israelites had to live in temporary shelters as their forefathers did when Yahweh brought them out of Egypt. It was celebrated from the 15th to the 22nd day of the seventh month (about mid-September to mid-October). *Go out... and... make boots*: As everything and everywhere in the Jewish religious practice, strict set -written- rules had to be followed.

(8:16) *Boots on... the House of Yahweh*: In the Temple Scroll from Qumran is written: "On the roof of the third story are columns for the constructing of boots for the Feast of Tabernacles, to be occupied by the elders, the chief-tains and commanders of thousands and hundreds."

(8:17) *From the days of Joshua... until that day*: This phrase does not mean that the Feast of Tabernacles had not been celebrated since Joshua's time, but that in this occasion the joy and involvement were really great.

(8:18) *They celebrated... in accordance with the regulation*: Again, as everywhere in the Jewish religious practice, strict set -written- rules had to be followed.

The Israelites confess their sins (9:1-37)

(9:1) On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads.

(9:2) Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. **(9:3)** They stood where they were and read from the

Book of the Law of Yahweh their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping Yahweh their God. **(9:4)** Standing on the stairs were the Levites -Joshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah and Kenani- who called with loud voices to Yahweh their God. **(9:5)** And the Levites -Joshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethaniah- said: "Stand up and praise Yahweh your God, Who is from everlasting to everlasting.

Blessed be Your glorious Name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. **(9:6)** You alone are Yahweh. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship You.

(9:7) You are Yahweh the [true] God, Who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. **(9:8)** You found his heart faithful to You, and You made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept Your promise because You are righteous.

(9:9) You saw the suffering of our forefathers in Egypt; You heard their cry at the Red Sea. **(9:10)** You sent miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for You knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a Name for Yourself, which remains to this day. **(9:11)** You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but You hurled their pursuers into the depths like a stone into mighty waters. **(9:12)** By day You led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take.

(9:13) You came down on Mount Sinai; You spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws and commands that are good. **(9:14)** You made known to them Your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees and laws through Moses. **(9:15)** In their hunger You gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst You brought them water from the rock; You told them to go in and to take possession of the land You had sworn with uplifted hand to give them.

(9:16) But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey Your commands. **(9:17)** They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles You performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in benevolence. Therefore You did not desert them,

(9:18) even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, 'This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,' or when they committed awful blasphemies.

(9:19) Because of Your great compassion You did not abandon them in the desert. By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take.

(9:20) You gave Your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold Your manna from their mouths, and You gave them water for their thirst.

(9:21) For forty years You sustained them in the desert; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen.

(9:22) You gave them kingdoms and nations, allotting them even the remotest frontiers. They took over the country of Sihon king of Heshbon and the country of Og king of Bashan. **(9:23)** You made their sons as numerous as the stars in the sky, and You brought them into the land that You told their fathers to enter and possess. **(9:24)** Their sons went in and took possession of the land. You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; You handed the Canaanites over to them, along with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with them as they pleased. **(9:25)** They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in Your great goodness.

(9:26) But they were disobedient and rebelled against You; they put Your law behind their backs. They killed Your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn their back to You; they committed awful blasphemies. **(9:27)** So You handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to You. From heaven You heard them, and in Your great compassion You gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.

(9:28) But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in Your sight. Then You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to You again, You heard from heaven, and in Your compassion You delivered them time after time.

(9:29) You warned them to return to Your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed Your commands. They sinned against Your ordinances, by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on You, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. **(9:30)** For many years You were patient with them. By Your Spirit You admonished them through Your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so You handed them over to the neighboring peoples. **(9:31)** But in Your great mercy You did

not put an end to them or abandon them, for You, Yahweh, are gracious and merciful.

(9:32) Now therefore, O [Yahweh] our great, mighty and awesome God, Who keeps His covenant of affection, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in Your eyes -the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings and leaders, upon our priests and prophets, upon our fathers and all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today. **(9:33)** In all that has happened to us, You have been just; You have acted faithfully, while we did wrong. **(9:34)** Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our fathers did not follow Your law; they did not pay attention to Your commands or the warnings You gave them. **(9:35)** Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying Your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land You gave them, they did not serve You or turn from their evil ways.

(9:36) But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land You gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces. **(9:37)** Because of our sins, its abundant harvest goes to the kings You have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. We are in great distress.

(9:1) *Twenty-fourth day:* October 30, 445 BC. *Fasting... sackcloth... dust:* Exterior demonstrations of devotion in a day dedicated to penance and confession.

(9:2) *Those of Israel descent had separated...:* Ceremonies and acts of penance and confession of national sin were reserved for the Israelites of sure descent, excluding all other people living with them.

(9:3) *A quarter of the day:* That is, about three hours.

(9:4-5) *Stand up and...:* Psalm 78:4.

(9: 5-37) *Blessed be...:* A long hymn (vv. 9:5-31) ending in a prayer (vv. 9:32-37), it reviews Yahweh's grace and power in creation (v. 9:6), in the Abrahamic covenant (vv. 9:7-8), in Egypt and at the Red Sea (vv. 9:9-11), in the desert and at Sinai (vv. 9:12-21), during the conquest of Canaan (vv. 9:22-25), through the judges (vv. 9:26-28), through the prophets (vv. 9:29-31) and in the present situation (vv. 9:32-37).

The agreement of the people (9:38; 10:1-39)

(9:38) In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it."

(10:1) Those who sealed it were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hachaliah, Zedakiah, **(10:2)** Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, **(10:3)** Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah, **(10:4)** Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, **(10:5)** Harim, Mere-

moth, Obadiah, **(10:6)** Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, **(10:7)** Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, **(10:8)** Maaziah, Bilgai and Shemaiah. These were the priests. **(10:9)** The Levites: Joshua son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadah, Kadmiel, **(10:10)** and their associates: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, **(10:11)** Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, **(10:12)** Zaccur, She-rebiah, Shebaniah, **(10:13)** Hodiah, Bani and Beninu. **(10:14)** The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattuh, Bani, **(10:15)** Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, **(10:16)** Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, **(10:17)** Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, **(10:18)** Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, **(10:19)** Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, **(10:20)** Magpiash, Meshullama, Hezir, **(10:21)** Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, **(10:22)** Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, **(10:23)** Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, **(10:24)** Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, **(10:25)** Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, **(10:26)** Ahiah, Hanan, Ananiah, **(10:27)** Malluch, Harim and Baanah.

(10:28) The rest of the people -priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, Temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of Yahweh, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand- **(10:29)** all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of Yahweh given through Moses the servant of Yahweh and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of Yahweh our God.

(10:30) We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or to take their daughters for our sons.

(10:31) When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts.

(10:32) We assume the responsibility for carrying out the command to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the House of [Yahweh] our God: **(10:33)** for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbath, New Moon festivals and appointed feasts; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the House of [Yahweh] our God.

(10:34) We -the priests, the Levites and the people- have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the House of [Yahweh] our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of Yahweh our God, as it is written in the Law.

(10:35) We also assume responsibility for bringing to the House of Yahweh each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree.

(10:36) As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the House of [Yahweh] our God, to the priests ministering there.

(10:37) Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the House of [Yahweh] our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and oil. And we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. **(10:38)** A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the House of [Yahweh] our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. **(10:39)** The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and oil to the storerooms where the articles of the Sanctuary are kept and where the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the singers stay.

We will not neglect the House of [Yahweh] our God.

(9:38) *In view of all this...:* After considering the implications of the hymn-prayer of vv. 9:5-37. *A binding agreement:* Actually an oath, to always follow Yahweh's Law and its directives.

(10:1-27) *Those who...:* A list of 84 Jewish leaders who signed the binding agreement as representatives of the whole population.

(10:28-29) *The rest of the people:* The whole population gave its verbal approval in a formal way, with a curse and an oath.

(10:30) *We promise not...:* What was at the time the most important and difficult pledge to respect.

(10:31-33) *When... on Sabbath.... Every seventh year... We assume the responsibility for...:* A list of pledges thought for the correction of the present situation. *A third of a shekel:* About 1.35 drachma (1 drachma was the average daily pay for a hired worker).

(10:34) *Cast lots:* To avoid the possibility of making privileged choices. *Contribution of wood:* The perpetual burning of fire on the Sanctuary Altar would have required a continual supply of wood.

(10:35) *Firstfruits:* Brought to the Temple to support the priests.

(10:36) *Firstborn:* The first male offspring of all domesticated animals had to be offered as a sacrifice to Yahweh -with the exception of the donkeys who, for their importance as pack animals, could be redeemed sacrificing a lamb. The same applied to the firstborn sons, who had to be redeemed.

(10:37-38) *Storerooms:* Chambers in the courts of the Temple were used as storage rooms for gold and silver sacred articles and for the offerings of grain, wine and oil. *The first of our...:* Actually, the firstfruits of their

crops. *A tithe*: A tenth of all earnings and produce of the land, meant for supporting the Levites. *The Levites... a tenth of the tithes*: The Levites were to tithe the tithes they received to help provide for the priests' needs.

(10:39) *We will not neglect the house of [Yahweh]*: As they had done many times.

The new residents of Jerusalem (11:1-36)

(11:1) Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. **(11:2)** The people commended all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

(11:3) These are the provincial leaders who settled in Jerusalem (now some Israelites, priests, Levites, Temple servants and descendants of Solomon's servants lived in the various towns of Judah, each on his own property and in his own town, **(11:4)** while other people from both Judah and Benjamin lived in Jerusalem): From the descendants of Judah: Athaiah son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, a descendant of Perez; **(11:5)** and Maaseiah son of Baruch, the son of Col-Hozeh, the son of Hazaiiah, the son of Adaiiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, a descendant of Shelah. **(11:6)** The descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem totaled 468 able men. **(11:7)** From the descendants of Benjamin: Sallu 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, **(11:8)** and his followers, Gabbai and Sallai -928 men. **(11:9)** Joel son of Zicri was their chief officer, and Judah son of Has-senuah was over the Second District of the city. **(11:10)** From the priests: Jedaiah son of Joiarib, Jakin; **(11:11)** Seraiah son of Hilkiyah, the son of Me-shullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, supervisor in the House of Yahweh, **(11:12)** and their associates, who carried on work for the Temple -822 men; Adaiiah son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malkijah, **(11:13)** and his associates, who were heads of families -242 men; Amashsai son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer, **(11:14)** and his associates, who were able men -128. Their chief officer was Zabdiel son of Haggadolim. **(11:15)** From the Levites: Shemaiah son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni; **(11:16)** Shabbethai and Jozabad, two of the heads of the Levites, who had charge of the outside work of the House of Yahweh; **(11:17)** Mat-taniah son of Mica, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, the director who led in thanksgiving and prayer; Bakbukiah, second among

his associates; and Abda son of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jedduthun. **(11:18)** The Levites in the holy city totaled 284. **(11:19)** The gatekeepers: Akkub, Talmon and his associates, who kept watch at the gates -172 men.

(11:20) The rest of the Israelites, with the priests and Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, each on his ancestral property.

(11:21) The Temple servants lived on the hill of Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of them.

(11:22) The chief officer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi son of Bunni, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica. Uzzi was one of Asaph's descendants, who were the singers responsible for the service of the House of Yahweh. **(11:23)** The singers were under the king's orders, which regulated their daily activity.

(11:24) Pethahiah son of Meshezabel, one of the descendants of Zerah son of Judah, was the king's agent in all affairs relating to the people.

(11:25) As for the villages with their fields, some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath-Arba and its surrounding settlements, in Dibon and its settlements, in Jekabzeel and its villages, **(11:26)** in Jeshua, in Moladah, in Beth-Pelet, **(11:27)** in Hazar-Shual, in Beersheba and its settlements, **(11:28)** in Ziklag, in Meconah and its settlements, **(11:29)** in En-Rimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth, **(11:30)** Zanoah, Adullam and their villages, in Lachish and its fields, and in Azekah and its settlements. So they were living all the way from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnin.

(11:31) The descendants of the Benjamites from Geba lived in Micmah, Aija, Bethel and its settlements, **(11:32)** in Anathoth, Nob and Ananuah, **(11:33)** in Hazor, Ramah and Gittaim, **(11:34)** in Hadid, Zeboim and Neballat, **(11:35)** in Lod and Ono, and in the Valley of the Craftsmen.

(11:36) Some of the divisions of the Levites of Judah settled in Benjamin.

(11:1) *The leaders... settled in Jerusalem, and... one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem:* Along with all the leaders, one tenth of the people were to reside in Jerusalem, to repopulate the city. Josephus (*Antiquities*, 11.5.8) asserts: "Nehemiah, seeing that the city had a too small population, urged the priests and Levites to leave the countryside and to move to the city and remain there, for he had prepared houses for them at his own expense."

(11:2) *Men who volunteered:* Even if some decided to move voluntarily, it is evident that most preferred to stay in their hometowns.

(11:3-4) *Some Israelites, priests... lived in the towns of Judah:* Some of those people moved to Jerusalem only when they had to serve in the Tem-

-ple. *While other... lived in Jerusalem:* Other people who were not civil or religious leaders preferred to live in the city and not in the small towns or the countryside.

(11:3-19) *These are the... leaders who settled in Jerusalem:* The descendants of various family heads who moved to Jerusalem included 468 laymen of the tribe of Judah, 928 laymen of the tribe of Benjamin, 1,192 priests, 284 Levites and 172 gatekeepers -3,044 men in all.

(11:20-24) *The rest... ancestral property:* Those who did not live in Jerusalem, lived in the surrounding towns, in their inalienable hereditary possessions -including land, buildings and movable goods. *Hill of Ophel:* A fortified hill, the northern part of the southeastern hill of Jerusalem, which formed the original City of David, just south of the Temple area. *The singers... under the king's orders:* Most probably, following the rules set by king David, who had regulated the service of the Levites, including the singers.

(11:25-36) *The people of Judah lived in...:* In the postexilic period under Nehemiah some of the people of the tribe of Judah settled in 17 towns and their surrounding villages, from the Valley of Hinnom (just south of Jerusalem) to as far as Beersheba (about 32 miles south of Jerusalem). *The descendants of the Benjamites...:* Some of the people of the tribe of Benjamin settled in 15 towns and in the Valley of the Craftsmen, all in the region north of Judah. *Some of... the Levites of Judah... in Benjamin:* Surprisingly, not respecting the practice of residence in the ancestral property.

Priests and Levites (12:1-26)

(12:1) These were the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and with Joshua:

Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, **(12:2)** Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, **(12:3)** Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, **(12:4)** Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah, **(12:5)** Mijamin, Moadiah, Bilgah, **(12:6)** Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, **(12:7)** Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah and Jedaiah. These were the leaders of the priests and their associates in the days of Joshua.

(12:8) The Levites were Joshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and also Mattaniah, who, together with his associates, was in charge of the songs of thanksgiving. **(12:9)** Bakbukiah and Unni, their associates, stood opposite them in the services.

(12:10) Joshua was the father of Joiakim, Joiakim the father of Eliashib, Eliashib the father of Joiada, **(12:11)** Joiada the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan the father of Jaddua.

(12:12) In the days of Joiakim, these were the heads of the priestly fami-

lies: of Seraiah's family, Meraiah; of Jeremiah's, Hananiah; **(12:13)** of Ezra's, Meshullam; of Amariah's, Jehohanan; **(12:14)** of Malluch's, Jonathan; of Shecaniah's, Joseph; **(12:15)** of Harim's, Adna; of Meremoth's, Helkai; **(12:16)** of Iddo's, Zechariah; of Ginnethon's, Meshullam; **(12:17)** of Abijah's, Zicri; of Miniamin's and Moaadhiah's, Piltai; **(12:18)** of Bilgah's, Shammua; of Shemaiah's, Jehonathan; **(12:19)** of Joiarib's, Mattenai; of Jedaiah's, Uzzi; **(12:20)** of Sallu's, Kallai; of Amok's, Eber; **(12:21)** of Hilkiah's, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah's, Nethanel. **(12:22)** The family heads of the Levites in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan and Jaddua, as well as those of the priests, were recorded in the reign of Darius the Persian. **(12:23)** The family heads among the descendants of Levi up to the time of Johanan son of Eliashib were recorded in the Book of the Annals. **(12:24)** And the leaders of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Joshua son of Kadmiel, and their associates, who stood opposite them to give praise and thanksgiving, one section responding to the other, as prescribed by David the man of Yahweh.

(12:25) Mattaniah, Bahbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon and Akkub were gatekeepers who guarded the storerooms at the gates. **(12:26)** They served in the days of Joiakim son of Joshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest and scribe.

(12:1-7) *These were the priests...*: A list of the leaders of the priests and of their associates returned from the Babylonian exile in 537 BC.

(12:8-9) *The Levites were...*: The names of the leaders of the Levites returned in 537 BC. *Stood opposite them*: The singing was antiphonal, with the two sections of the choir standing opposite to each other.

(12:10-11) *Jaddua*: The great-grandson of Eliashib, the high priest at the time of Nehemiah, considered in this genealogy because evidently he became high priest when Nehemiah was still living.

(12:12-21) *In the days of Joiakim...*: An important list for the determination of the priestly genealogies.

(12:22) *Recorded in the reign of Darius the Persian*: Darius II, who ruled Persia from 423 to 404 BC.

(12:23) *Book of the Annals*: The official Temple chronicle, containing various lists and records.

(12:24-26) *And the leaders of the Levites were*: Other indications, useful for the proper determination of the genealogies.

Dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (12:27-43)

(12:27) At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were

sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. **(12:28)** The singers also were brought from the region around Jerusalem -from the villages of the Netophathites, **(12:29)** from Beth-Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. **(12:30)** When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.

(12:31) I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate. **(12:32)** Hoshai and half the leaders of Judah followed them, **(12:33)** along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, **(12:34)** Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, **(12:35)** as well as some priests with trumpets, and also Zechariah son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, **(12: 36)** and his associates -Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani- with musical instruments prescribed by David the man of Yah-weh. Ezra the scribe led the procession. **(12:37)** At the Fountain Gate they continued directly up the steps of the City of David on the ascent to the wall and passed above the House of David to the Water Gate on the east.

(12:38) The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people -past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, **(12:39)** over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard they stopped.

(12:40) The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the House of Yahweh; so did I, with half the officials, **(12:41)** as well as the priests -Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah with their trumpets- **(12:42)** and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam and Ezer. The choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah. **(12:43)** And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because Yahweh had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.

(12:27-29) *The Levites... The singers also were brought...:* Nehemiah had all the Levites and the Temple singers who had settled in various towns join the others in Jerusalem for the dedication ceremonies of the rebuilt wall.

(12:30) *Purified themselves... purified the people:* The preparation also included ceremonial cleansing of all the people and of the wall itself -gates included.

(12:31-43) *Two large choirs:* Two great processions started from the center of the western section of the wall. The first procession, led by Ezra, moved in a counterclockwise direction along the wall; the second, with Nehemiah, moved in a clockwise direction. They met between the Water Gate and the Gate of the Guard, then entered the Temple area. *Go up on top of the wall. To proceed on top of the wall... On top of the wall:* Their walking on top of the wall was a demonstration that the walls were strong, so answering Tobiah's mocking claim about their weakness.

Reintroduction of contributions and tithes (12:44-47)

(12:44) At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns [the Israelites] were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites. **(12:45)** They performed the service of [Yahweh] their God and the service of purification, as did also the singers and gate-keepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon. **(12:46)** For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to Yahweh. **(12:47)** So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and gatekeepers. They also set aside the portion for the other Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron.

(12:44) *Storerooms:* Side rooms of the Temple where the people had to bring the various contributions required by the Law. *Judah was pleased:* At that time the people gladly contributed their offerings to support the priests and the Levites -not so in other periods.

(12:45-46) *According the commands of David and his son Solomon:* The two great kings -more than 500 years earlier- had established the set up and the course of all main ceremonies. *Asaph:* The director of the music under David.

(12:47) *All Israel contributed...:* During that period the people of Israel dutifully did what was commanded by the Law (but in many other periods they didn't).

Nehemiah's reforms (13:1-31)

(13:1) On a day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of Yahweh, **(13:2)** because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. ([Yahweh] our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing). **(13:3)** When the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent.

(13:4) Before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the House of [Yahweh] our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah, **(13:5)** and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and Temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests.

(13:6) But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Some time later I asked his permission **(13:7)** and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the House of Yahweh. **(13:8)** I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. **(13:9)** I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the House of Yahweh, with the grain offerings and the incense.

(13:10) I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and singers responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields. **(13:11)** So I rebuked the officials and asked them, "Why is the House of Yahweh neglected?" Then I called the Levites and the singers and stationed them at their posts.

(13:12) All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine and oil into the storerooms. **(13:13)** I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, their assistant, because these men were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their brothers.

(13:14) Remember me for this, O [Yahweh] my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the House of [Yahweh] my God and its services.

(13:15) In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling

food on that day. **(13:16)** Men from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. **(13:17)** I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing -desecrating the Sabbath day? **(13:18)** Didn't your forefathers do the same thing, so that [Yahweh] our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath."

(13:19) When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. **(13:20)** Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem. **(13:21)** But I warned them and said, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath. **(13:22)** Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.

Remember me for this also, O [Yahweh] my God, and show mercy to me according to Your great benevolence.

(13:23) Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. **(13:24)** Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. **(13:25)** I rebuked the men and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in Yahweh's name and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves. **(13:26)** Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon king of Israel sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was cherished by [Yahweh] his God, and Yahweh made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women. **(13:27)** Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to [Yahweh] our God by marrying foreign women?"

(13:28) One of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the high priest was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite. And I drove him away from me.

(13:29) Remember them, O [Yahweh] my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites.

(13:30) So I purified the priests and the Levites of everything foreign, and assigned them duties, each to his own task. **(13:31)** I also made provi-

sion for contributions of wood at designated times, and for the firstfruits.

Remember me with favor, O [Yahweh] my God.

(13:1) *On a day:* Not immediately after the reconstruction and dedication of Jerusalem's wall, but after Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem for his second term as governor (vv. 13:6-7).

(13:2) *Hired Balaam to call a curse:* At the time of the conquest of Canaan, Balak, king of Moab, hired the well-known diviner Balaam trying to oppose Israel through pagan divination (Numbers 22:1-39, 23:1-30, 24:1-25). *Yahweh... turned the curse into a blessing:* Yahweh spoke to Balaam who, actually, blessed four times Israel instead of cursing it (Numbers 22:1-39, 23:1-30, 24:1-25).

(13:3) *When the people heard... they excluded...:* Accepting and then following Yahweh's Law for a short while, as they did so many times.

(13:4-5) *Before this:* Before the reading of the Book of Moses reported in v. 13:1. *Eliashib... had provided him with a large room:* Eliashib was the high priest. During Nehemiah's absence from Jerusalem to return to the Persian king's court, Tobiah, one of his enemies, had used his influence with Eliashib to get the use of a Temple chamber ordinarily set aside for the storage of tithes and other offerings.

(13:6-7) *Thirty-second year of Artaxerxes:* Nehemiah served his first term as governor for 12 years before being recalled to court in 433 BC, after which (two or more years later) he returned to Jerusalem for a second term whose length is not known. *Here I learned...:* As usual, even during a short absence of their main leader, the Israelites fell back and did not respect Yahweh's commands.

(13:8-9) *I... threw all Tobiah's... gave orders:* Nehemiah, a man of action, expressed his indignation by taking immediate action.

(13:10-12) *I also learned... I rebuked... All... brought the tithes:* Another immediate action, setting back the service at the Temple and the proper delivery of the tithes.

(13:13) *I put... in charge:* Of the four treasurers, one was a priest, one a Levite, one a scribe and one a layman of rank.

(13:14) *Remember me...:* Nehemiah's actions were always thought for pleasing and serving Yahweh.

(13:15-16) *In those days I saw men... on the Sabbath:* The temptation to violate the Sabbath rest was especially characteristic of the merchants -Jewish and not. And, anyway, the Jews resident in Jerusalem were clearly buying from those merchants on the Sabbath.

(13:17-18) *I rebuked the nobles:* Because they were the leaders and had to respect -and to have everybody else to respect- the Sabbath. *Desecrating:* They were turning the sacred day into a common one.

(13:19-21) *When evening shadows...:* Friday before sunset, when the Sabbath began. The Israelites, like the Babylonians, counted their days from sunset to sunset (the Egyptians, from sunrise to sunrise). The beginning of the Sabbath was signaled by a priest blowing a trumpet. *The doors... shut and...:* To be sure that no merchant would come in during the Sabbath.

(13:22) *Remember me:* Nehemiah's actions were always thought for pleasing and serving Yahweh.

(13:23-24) *I saw men who had married women from...:* The same problem of intermarriage Ezra had dealt with some 25 years earlier.

(13:25) *I rebuked... called curses... beat... pulled out their hair:* Ways to formally express his grief and dissatisfaction. *You are not to give...:* Even if here Nehemiah doesn't speak of dissolving the unlawful unions, that was clearly done (v. 13:30: "I purified the... of everything foreign").

(13:26-27) *Solomon... sinned. He was led into sin by foreign women:* Solomon began his reign by humbly asking wisdom from Yahweh. But his foreign wives led him to worship -or to act as worshipping- other gods.

(13:28) *Son-in-law of Sanballat:* Sanballat, one of Nehemiah's main enemies, was a Horonite and one of his daughters had married a son of Joiada, the high priest. Now, the high priest -and so his sons- was never to marry a foreigner.

(13:29) *Remember them... they defiled the priestly office:* Because a priest was to marry "only a virgin from his own people" (Leviticus 21:14).

(13:30-31) *I purified...:* Dissolving the unlawful unions as Ezra had done many years earlier. *Assigned them duties... made provision for...:* Properly reorganizing all the religious and social-religious activities.

The Book of Malachi, a prophet of Yahweh

Author

Traditionally Malachi is considered the last prophet of the Old Testament, before John the Baptist. The content of this book clearly indicates that it was written by a prophet. But nothing is known of him and of his family line and he is not mentioned by name elsewhere in the Bible.

Background

Encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the reconstruction of Jerusalem Temple was completed in 516 BC. Later, in 458 BC, Ezra the priest, with the support of king Artaxerxes, reintroduced the proper Temple worship and the prohibition of intermarriage with foreign women.

Later on, in 445 BC, king Artaxerxes appointed Nehemiah governor of Israel and permitted him to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. Nehemiah reintroduced the Law of Moses with the prohibition of usury and of mixed marriages, the respect of the Sabbath rest and the giving of tithes and faithful offerings.

In 433 BC Nehemiah returned to the service of the Persian king, and during his absence the Jews fell into their usual sins once more. Later, when he came back to Jerusalem, Nehemiah discovered that the tithes were ignored, the Sabbath was not respected, the people intermarried with foreigners, and the priests had become corrupt.

Date

The similarity between the sins denounced by Nehemiah and Malachi suggests that the two were contemporary. The Book of Malachi may have been written during Nehemiah's return to Persia (433 - ??? BC), as it is suggested by the governor mentioned in v. 1:8, who clearly is not Nehemiah.

Themes

The Jews, even if allowed to return from exile and to rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem, had some reasons for being discouraged; reasons which brought about a general religious indifference: Israel remained only a small province of the Persian Empire, and the glorious future announced by the prophets -including Haggai and Zechariah- had not been realized. So they began to lose hope, their worship degenerated into a perpetuation of mere forms and they no longer took the Law seriously.

Malachi rebuked their doubts on Yahweh's affection and the faithlessness of both priests and people. Because Yahweh's covenant with His people was still valid, Israel had not been completely destroyed for her persistent unfaithfulness, and a -repentant and reformed- remnant would again experienced His blessing.

The Book of Malachi**Jacob cherished, Esau not (1:1-5)**

(1:1) An oracle: The word of Yahweh to Israel through Malachi.

(1:2) Yahweh says, "I had been fond of you, but you ask, 'How had You been fond of us?'"

Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Yet I had been fond of Jacob, **(1:3)** but I had not been fond of Esau, and I have turned his mountains into a waste-land and left his inheritance to the desert jackals."

(1:4) Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins."

But this is what Yahweh the Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the wicked land, a people always under the wrath of Yahweh. **(1:5)** You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is Yahweh -even beyond the borders of Israel!'"

(1:1) *The word of... through...:* To assure that what follows is true prophetic revelation.

(1:2-3) *I had been fond of you:* At that time the Jews had clearly lost hope in Yahweh's interest in Israel. This declaration of divine affection was to remind them that they were Yahweh's chosen people. *How had You been fond?:* This question highlights Israel's failure to believe properly in Yahweh and to respect the commands of His covenant. Their question may seem legitimate; about 100 years had passed since the people had returned from the Babylonian exile, yet the kingdom predicted by Yahweh's prophets had still not come. And they were dominated by foreigners and experienced hard times. The point is that such misfortunes were the result -not the cause- of their disobedience, and the nation as a whole needed to repent from the sin of unbelief. *Esau Jacob's brother:* The twin sons of Isaac. Esau the firstborn (also called Edom) sold to his brother Jacob his birthright. *I had been fond of Jacob... not been fond of Esau:* Not a matter of being fond or not, but of choice. Yahweh, foreknowing the attitude of the two brothers, chose Jacob and not Esau for a covenant relationship. *His mountains... a waste-land:* Malachi's words about Edom (Esau's land) echo those of the earliest prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Obadiah).

(1:4-5) *Edom may say... I will demolish. You will see it...:* The proud self-reliance of the Edomites had not assured their security and their future. Both Israel and Edom had received judgment from Yahweh at the hands of the Babylonians in the sixth century BC. Yet Yahweh repeatedly promised to restore Israel, but He condemned Edom never to be restored. And, in effect, between about 550 and 400 BC the Nabatean Arabs gradually forced the Edomites from their homeland.

Blemished sacrifices (1:6-14)

(1:6) "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I [Yahweh] am a father, where is the honor due to Me? If I am a master, where is the respect due to Me? It is you, O priests, who show disrespect for My Name.

But you ask, 'How did we show disrespect for Your Name?'

(1:7) You place defiled food on My altar. But you ask, 'How have we defiled You?'

By showing that Yahweh's table can be disrespected. **(1:8)** When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?"

(1:9) Now implore Yahweh to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will He accept you?

(1:10) Yahweh the Almighty says, "Oh, that one of you would shut the Temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on My Altar! I am not pleased with you, and I will accept no offerings from your hands. **(1:11)** My Name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to My Name, because My Name will be great among the nations.

(1:12) But you profane It by saying of My table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' **(1:13)** And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously.

When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animal and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands? **(1:14)** Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to Me. For I am a great king, and My Name is to be feared among the nations."

(1:6) *A son honors his father, and a servant his master:* "Honors," in the sense of giving the due and appropriate respect. This is the proper relationship in human society, a relationship all the Jews would have recognized as absolutely correct and necessary. *If I am a father... If... a master...:* The Israelites could have considered Yahweh either like a father to Israel, or like a master; anyway, in both cases, the fact that honor and respect is due to Him is beyond dispute. *You, O priests,... show disrespect for My Name... How did we show...?:* The main charge is directed to the priests because, after the return from the Babylonian exile, they were responsible to teach the people Yahweh's covenant with Israel and they had to be the first to respect all His commands. If the priests failed to honor Yahweh, what could be expected of the people? To remember that the words "My Name" stand for Yahweh Himself.

(1:7-8) *Defiled food:* That is, defective animals, which were unacceptable as sacrifices (Deuteronomy 15:21). "Food" because the priests ate from the sacrifices. *Your Governor:* Surely not Nehemia, who in that period had returned to the service of the Persian king (433 - ??? BC) and who, anyway, had never demanded the food allotted to the governor (Nehemiah 5:17-18).

(1:9) *Now... will He accept you?:* A rhetorical question.

(1:10) *Would shut the Temple doors...:* Much better to have no sacrifices at all than sacrifices offered with such a lack of respect.

(1:11) *My Name will be great... In every place incense and...:* At the end all nations will recognize Yahweh as the only true God and will offer him proper sacrifices.

(1:12-13) *But you...:* Malachi repeats the charge that the priests were profaning Yahweh's Name. In vv. 1:7-8 the actions of the priests were condemned; here their attitude. They even recognized that these sacrificial practices were improper, by saying that Yahweh's table was defiled and its food contemptible. But they did not care to take the trouble of setting things right. Being involved in offering the sacrifices was just a burden. *When you... should I...?:* Clearly, Yahweh can't accept such a kind of sacrifices offered with such a kind of attitude.

(1:14) *Vows to... then sacrifices a blemished animal:* An animal sacrificed in fulfillment of a vow had to be a male without defect (Leviticus 22:18-23).

Admonition for the priests (2:1-9)

(2:1) "And now this admonition is for you, O priests. **(2:2)** If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor My Name, I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor Me.

(2:3) Because of you I will rebuke your descendants, I will spread on your faces the offal from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it. **(2:4)** And you will know that I have sent you this admonition so that My covenant with Levi may continue. **(2:5)** My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered Me and stood in awe of My Name. **(2:6)** True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.

(2:7) For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction -because he is the messenger of Yahweh the Almighty. **(2:8)** But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have cause many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with

Levi. **(2:9)** So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed My ways but have shown partiality in matters of the Law."

(2:1-2) *Curse your blessings:* It was a priests' function to pronounce Yahweh's blessings on the people (Numbers 6:23-27) but, with their blessings become curses, their priestly function had become worse than useless.

(2:3) *Spread on your faces the offal:* An expression of official disgrace in the eyes of all people. The offals, that is, the entrails of the sacrificed animals were to be taken "outside the camp" and burned (Leviticus 16:27).

(2:4-5) *Covenant with Levi:* All the priests were chosen from the tribe of Levi, so the covenant was with all of them.

(2:6-7) *True instruction was...:* Levi and all the priests were responsible for teaching the Law of Moses. Levi, in particular, had been the example of the right and proper priest. *Messenger:* As a teacher of the law, a priest forwards the message of Yahweh to the people.

(2:8) *Violated the covenant:* By unfaithful teaching, by improper behavior and, in that period, by intermarrying with foreign women.

(2:9) *Despised and humiliated:* The people, seeing how far their priest were from what they should have been, didn't trust them anymore and considered them socially useless.

Judah unfaithful (2:10-16)

(2:10) Have we not all one Father? Did not [Yahweh] the only God created us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?

(2:11) Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the holiness Yahweh likes, by marrying the daughters of foreign gods. **(2:12)** As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may Yahweh cut him off the tents of Jacob -even though he brings offerings to Yahweh the Almighty.

(2:13) Another thing you do: You flood Yahweh's altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. **(2:14)** You ask, "Why?" It is because Yahweh is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

(2:15) Has not Yahweh made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking the promised offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

(2:16) Yahweh the God of Israel says, "I hate divorce, and a man's divorce makes violence to his marriage."

So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

(2:10) *Have we not...? Did not [Yahweh]...? Why do we...?*: Malachi rebukes all the people and then gives two examples of their sins: Marrying pagan women (v. 2:11) and divorcing from their Israelite wives (v. 2:14-16).

(2:11-12) *Broken faith... by marrying the daughters of foreign gods*: That is, pagan women. Such marriages were strictly forbidden in the covenant law because they would lead to apostasy. *Cut him off from the tents of Jacob*: A man who married a pagan woman had to be excluded from the Jewish social and religious community.

(2:13) *Weep and wail because He no longer...*: The men who had married pagan women -and divorced their Israelites wives- were coming out with these exterior expressions of grievance because Yahweh did not respond any more to their sacrifices with His blessing.

(2:14) *Yahweh... is the witness between...*: Marriage is a covenant, and a covenant is an agreement signed in the presence of witnesses -in this case, of Yahweh. *Wife of your youth*: When their wife became old, many husbands divorced from her, taking a younger one -usually a foreigner.

(2:15) *Yahweh made them one*: The divine intention for husband and wife was monogamy. Together they were to form an inseparable union (Genesis 2:24). *Promised offspring*: To maintain Yahweh's promise of a numerous Israel, their children had to be the offspring of marriages among Israelites only.

(2:16) *A man's divorce...*: By divorcing from his wife a man was doing violence to her, both morally and materially. *Guard yourself in spirit*: The Israelites were not to break faith with one another by divorcing their Jewish wives and intermarry with pagans.

The day of judgment (2:17; 3:1-5)

(2:17) You have wearied Yahweh with your words.

"How have we wearied Him?" you ask.

By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of Yahweh, and He is pleased with them" or "Where is [Yahweh], God of Justice?"

(3:1) Yahweh the Almighty says, "See, I will send My messenger, who will prepare the way before him [the Messiah]. Then suddenly the Messiah you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come."

(3:2) But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. **(3:3)** He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then Yahweh will have men who will bring offerings of righteousness, **(3:4)** and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to Yahweh, as in days gone by, as in former years.

(3:5) Yahweh the Almighty says, "So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice. They do not fear Me."

(2:17) *Wearied Yahweh:* With all their formal prayers and not sincere declarations of faith. *How have we...?:* The people were oblivious to their lack of faith in Yahweh and His covenant. *All who do evil are good... Where is [Yahweh], God of justice?:* The earthly prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous is an old and always present problem. In the Old Testament it was even more serious because of the promise of material prosperity as a reward for obedience to Yahweh's Law (Deuteronomy 28). However, many of these promises were intended for the entire nation, not for single individuals. The answer to this problem is given only in a futuristic perspective: at the end, Yahweh will come in judgment and will punish the wicked (v. 3:5).

(3:1) *My messenger... will prepare the way:* A prophecy fulfilled in John the Baptist. *Suddenly the Messiah you are seeking...:* A prophecy fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Twice he will come "suddenly": The first time, on earth, as a Messiah of peace -not the warrior Messiah expected by the Jews. The second time, at the end of time -nobody but Yahweh knows when- for the universal judgment. *To his temple:* The first time, in Israel. The second time, at the end of time, on the whole earth. *The messenger of the covenant:* The Messiah, as Yahweh's representative, will confirm the spiritual content of the old covenant and establish the new one.

(3:2) *Who can endure... stand...?:* Nobody is totally without sin. *Day of his coming:* At the end of time, at the second coming of Yahweh's Messiah. *Like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap:* Classical symbols of spiritual purification.

(3:3-4) *Purify the Levites:* Those who were supposed to be Yahweh's representatives and who served at the altar will be purged of their sins and unfaithfulness. *Then... the offerings... will be acceptable:* Because they will give up their improper attitude and the present practice of offering defective animals.

(3:5) *I will come near to you... I will... testify against...*: The judgment of Israel will not be limited to the Levites; it will include the whole nation. Yahweh will purge the nation of all the morally unfit people. Yahweh's removing all sinners from Israel will be His answer to the nation's question about His justice (v. 2:17).

Robbing Yahweh (3:6-18)

(3:6) "I, Yahweh, do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. **(3:7)** Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from My decrees and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you.

But you ask, 'How are we to return?'

(3:8) Will a man rob Yahweh? Yet you rob Me.

But you ask, 'How do we rob You?'

In tithes and offerings. **(3:9)** You are under a curse -the whole nation of you- because you are robbing Me. **(3:10)** Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My House. Test Me in this, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will have no room enough for it. **(3:11)** I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not lose their fruit. **(3:12)** Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land.

(3:13) You have said harsh things against Me. Yet you ask, 'What have we said against You?'

(3:14) You have said, 'It is futile to serve Yahweh. What did we gain by carrying out His requirements and going about like mourners before Yahweh the Almighty? **(3:15)** But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and those who challenge Yahweh escape.'"

(3:16) Then those who feared Yahweh talked with each other, and Yahweh listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared Yahweh and honored His Name.

(3:17) Yahweh the Almighty says, "They will be Mine in the days when I make up My treasured possessions. I will spare them just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. **(3:18)** And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve Me and those who do not."

(3:6) *I... do not change*: Contrary to what many in Malachi's days were thinking, Yahweh remained faithful to His covenant. It was the Israelites that weren't keeping their part. *So you... are not destroyed*: They had not

been destroyed as a people, in spite of their history of unfaithfulness, exactly because Yahweh was keeping His part of the covenant with the descendants of Jacob.

(3:7) *Return... and I will return:* In few words, the essence of the covenant, a bilateral pact. *How... to return?:* The Israelites pretended to ignore their unrespect of the covenant.

(3:8-10) *You rob Me. How...? In tithes and offerings:* In Malachi's days the tithes were ignored, the priests had become corrupt, the Sabbath was not respected and the people intermarried with foreigners. *Storehouse:* The Treasury rooms of the Temple. *Open the floodgates of heaven:* Symbolic for abundant provision of food. *Pour out so much blessing...:* The promised covenant blessing.

(3:11) *Pest... lose their fruit:* Examples of the threatened curses.

(3:12) *Then... will call you blessed:* In fulfillment of the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:2-3).

(3:13) *You have said harsh things... What have we...?:* Again, the spiritually insensitive people are portrayed as ignorant of their sin.

(3:14) *It is futile to serve Yahweh:* Because the redemption they longed for had not yet been realized. *What did we gain...?:* They presumed they had been faithful to Yahweh. *Going about like mourners?:* And they presumed they had repented of their mistakes by showing themselves in sackcloth and ashes -acts of external obedience not accompanied by true repentance.

(3:15) *The arrogant blessed; the evildoers prosper; those who challenge Yahweh escape:* In their unbelief, seeing that those who confronted Yahweh prospered and were not punished, the Israelites were calling "blessed" those who despised Yahweh and His Law.

(3:16) *Those who feared Yahweh:* Not all Israelites were as the covenant breakers seen above. Few were still loyal and respectful. *Talked with each other:* To gain moral strength by mutual encouragement. *Scroll of remembrance:* The meaning is that a permanent remembrance of their faithful and reverent response is kept in heaven.

(3:17-18) *They will be Mine... My treasured possession. I will... You will see the distinction between...:* Not only the righteous will live immediately with Yahweh but, in the day of final judgment, their position close to Yahweh will be seen by all.

The Day of Yahweh (4:1-6)

(4:1) Yahweh the Almighty says, "Surely the Day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will stubble, and that Day that is coming will set them on fire. Not a root or a branch will be left

to them. **(4:2)** But for you who revere My Name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. **(4:3)** Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the Day when I do these things.

(4:4) Remember the Law of My servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

(4:5) See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful Day of Yahweh comes. **(4:6)** He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; so I won't have to come and strike the land with a curse."

(4:1) *The Day*: The Day of Yahweh, the day of the final judgment. *Burn like a furnace*: Symbolic of severe judgment. *All... will stubble... on fire. Not a root... will be left*: Other classical, symbolical pictures of the punishment of the wicked.

(4:2) *Sun of righteousness... his healing*: A prophecy about Yahweh's Messiah -Jesus Christ- who is called "rising sun" in the New Testament (Luke 1:78-79). He will bring all people -in this life or in the next one- to spiritual renewal and final salvation. *You will leap like calves released from the stall*: Young calves often frolic about when released from confinement.

(4:3) *Trample... the wicked; they will be...*: Another classical, symbolical picture of the punishment of the wicked.

(4:4) *Remember*: A final exhortation to respect the covenant.

(4:5) *I will send... Elijah before...*: As Elijah came before Elisha (whose ministry was one of judgment and redemption), so a new "Elijah" (John the Baptist) will be sent to prepare Yahweh's people to the coming of His Messiah.

(4:6) *He will turn the hearts... so I won't have to...*: As a result of the ministry of this Elijah (John the Baptist) many people will repent and, as a consequence, will not experience Yahweh's judgment at the last day. But, if Israel as a nation does not repent, she will be dealt with as Yahweh had dealt with Edom (the Northern Kingdom, fallen to the Assyrians in 722 BC).

Appendix 1: Main Phases of the Old Testament

CREATION

Genesis

JACOB MOVES TO EGYPT (1876 BC)

Exodus (430 years)

EXODUS AND WANDERING IN THE DESERT (1446 BC)

Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (40 years)

ISRAEL CROSSES JORDAN (1406 BC)

AND BEGINS THE CONQUEST

(7 years)

CONQUEST COMPLETED (about 1350 BC)

Joshua (about 49 years)

JUDGES RULE (about 1350 BC)

Judges, Ruth (about 299 years)

SAUL RULES (1051 BC)

1 Samuel (40 years)

DAVID RULES (1011 BC)

2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles (40 years)

SOLOMON RULES (971 BC)

1 Kings 1-11, 2 Chronicles 1-9 (40 years)

KINGDOM DIVIDED IN ISRAEL AND JUDAH (931 BC)

Israel (North): 1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 17 (209 years)

Judah (South): 1 Kings 12 - 2 Kings 24, 2 Chronicles 10-36 (345 years)

ASSYRIA CONQUERS ISRAEL (722 BC)

BABYLON CONQUERS AND EXILES JUDAH (586 BC)

(70 years)

TEMPLE REBUILT (515 BC)

(85 years)

OLD TESTAMENT CLOSES (about 430 BC)

Appendix 2: Exile and Post-exile Main Events

- (All years: BC. Roman numerals: Jewish months. Arabic numerals: days)
- Splitting of the Kingdom in Northern and Southern Kingdoms. 931
 - Fall of Northern Kingdom to the Assyrians. 722
 - Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquers Jerusalem. 605
 - First deportation of the Jews to Babylon. 605
 - Second deportation of the Jews to Babylon. 597
 - Fall of Southern Kingdom to the Babylonians. 586
 - Destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon Temple. 586
 - Third deportation of the Jews to Babylon. 586
 - Cyrus the Great, king of Persia (559-530) conquers Babylon. Oct. 539
 - Cyrus' first year over Babylon. Mar. 538 - Mar. 537. (Ezra 1:1)
 - Cyrus' decree allowing the Jews to return and rebuild the Temple. 538
 - Return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and Joshua. 537. (Ezra 1:11)
 - Rebuilding of the Altar in Jerusalem. 537, VII. (Ezra 3:1)
 - Work on the Temple foundation begins. 536, II. (Ezra 3:8)
 - Opposition during Cyrus' reign. 536-530. (Ezra 4:1-5)
 - Work on the Temple stopped. 536-520. (Ezra 4:24)
 - Reign of Darius I the Great, king of Persia. 522-486
 - Haggai ministry. 520.
 - Zechariah ministry. 520 - ?
 - Work on Temple renewed. 520, VI 24. (Ezra 5:2; Haggai 1:14-15)
 - Tattenai's letter to Darius for the Temple's rebuilding. 519. (Ezra 5:3-6:14)
 - Temple completed and dedicated. 516, XII 3. (Ezra 6:15)
 - Reign of Xerxes, king of Persia. 485-465
 - Reign of Artaxerxes, king of Persia. 465-424
 - Ezra departs from Babylon. 458, I 1. (Ezra 7:6-9)
 - Ezra arrives in Jerusalem. 458, V 1. (Ezra 7:8-9)
 - People assemble in Jerusalem. 458, IX 20. (Ezra 10:9)
 - Committee begins investigation. 458, X 1. (Ezra 10:16)
 - Committee ends investigation. 457, I 1. (Ezra 10:17)
 - 20th year of Artaxerxes. 446-445. (Nehemiah 1:1)
 - Nehemiah approaches king Artaxerxes. 445, I. (Nehemiah 2:1)
 - Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem. 445, V. (Nehemiah 2:11)
 - Completion of the wall. 445, VI 25. (Nehemiah 6:15)
 - Public assembly in Jerusalem. 445, VII. (Nehemiah 8:1-2)
 - Feast of the Tabernacles. 445, VII 15-22. (Nehemiah 8:14)
 - Fast. 445, VII 24. (Nehemiah 9:1)
 - 32nd year of Artaxerxes. 433-432. (Nehemiah 5:14; 13:6)
 - Nehemiah recalled to Persia. 433. (Nehemiah 5:14; 13:6)
 - Malachi ministry. Shortly after 433.

Appendix 3: From Malachi to Jesus Christ**The Persian Period: 450-330 BC**

For about 200 years after Nehemiah's time the Persians controlled Israel, but the Jews were allowed to carry on their religious observances and were not interfered with. During this time Israel was ruled by High Priests who were responsible for the Jewish government.

The Hellenistic Period: 330-166 BC

1- Rule of Alexander the Great: 334-328 BC

In 333 BC the Persian armies stationed in Macedonia were defeated by Alexander the Great. He was convinced that Greek culture was the one force that could unify the world. Anyway, Alexander permitted the Jews to observe their laws and, when he built Alexandria in Egypt, he encouraged the Jews to live there. The Greek conquest prepared the way for the translation of the Old Testament into Greek (the Septuagint, circa 250 BC).

2- Rule of the Ptolemies of Egypt: 320-198 BC

In 320 BC Ptolemy I Soter conquered Jerusalem. (In 311 BC Seleucus I conquered Babylon beginning the Seleucid dynasty over Babylonia. In 223-187 BC Antiochus III the Great was the Seleucid ruler of Syria).

3- Rule of the Seleucids of Syria: 198-166 BC

In 198 BC Antiochus III defeated Egypt and gained control of Palestine. In 175-164 BC Antiochus IV Epiphanes, ruler of Syria, prohibited Judaism, which led to the Maccabean revolt in 166 BC under Judas Maccabeus' leadership.

The Hasmonean Period: 166-63 BC

At the beginning of this period the Jews were being heavily oppressed. The Ptolemies had been tolerant of the Jews and their religious practices but the Seleucid rulers were determined to force Hellenism on them. All copies of the Scriptures were ordered destroyed and Seleucid laws were enforced with extreme cruelty. At the end the oppressed Jews revolted (166-160 BC), led by Judas the Maccabee. From 160 BC onward an independent Israel was ruled by the High Priests of Jerusalem Temple. The High Priest Simon (142-134 BC) established the Hasmonean dynasty, an aristocratic and Hellenistic regime.

The Roman Period: 63 BC- DC

In the year 63 BC the Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem, and Palestine became a Roman province. Initially the local government was run by local princes controlled by Rome and then by procurators appointed by the Roman Emperor. At the time of Jesus Christ's birth Palestine was ruled by Herod the Great (a prince subject to Rome). At the time of Jesus Christ's death, by the Roman Procurator Pontius Pilatus.

Appendix 4: Jewish Religious Calendar
(a lunar calendar)

I = Nisan; Abib	= March-April
	<i>Passover (I,14). Unleavened Bread (I,15-21). Firstfruit (I,21)</i>
II = Ziv; Lyyar	= April-May
III = Sivan	= May-June
	<i>Pentecost (III,6). (50 days after Firstfruit)</i>
IV = Tammuz	= June-July
V = Ab	= July-August
VI = Elul	= August-September
VII = Tishri; Ethanim	= September-October
	<i>Trumpets (VII,1). Atonement (VII,10). Tabernacles (VII,15-21)</i>
VIII = Bul; Marchesvan	= October-November
IX = Kislev	= November-December
	<i>Temple Dedication or Hanukkah (IX,25)</i>
X = Tebeth	= December-January
XI = Shebat	= January-February
XII = Adar	= February-March
	<i>Purim (XII,13-14)</i>
XIII = Adar Sheni	= Intercalary month added about every 3 years so the lunar calendar would correspond to the solar one.

Note 1: Holidays of the month are in italics.

Note 2: When speaking of the number of years between two events, even a fraction of a year was counted as a full one.

Note 3: The Persian year begun in September-October.

Appendix 5: Old Testament Sacrifices

BURNT OFFERING

of: bull, ram or male bird (dove or young pigeon for the poor); wholly consumed, no defect

as: voluntary act of worship; atonement for unintentional sin; expression of devotion, commitment and complete surrender to Yahweh

GRAIN OFFERING

of: grain, fine flour, olive oil, incense, baked bread (cakes or wafers); salt, no yeast or honey; accompanied burnt offering and fellowship offering (along with drink offering of wine)

as: voluntary act of worship; recognition of Yahweh's goodness and provisions; devotion to Yahweh

FELLOWSHIP OFFERING

of: any animal without defect from herd or flock; variety of breads

as: voluntary act of worship; thanksgiving (it included a communal meal with the family)

SIN OFFERING

of: (1) young bull (for high priest or nation); (2) male goat (for leader); (3) female goat or lamb (for common person); (4) dove or pigeon (for the poor); (5) tenth of an ephah of fine flour (for the very poor)

as: mandatory atonement for specific unintentional sin; forgiveness of sin; cleansing from defilement

GUILT OFFERING

of: ram or lamb

as: mandatory atonement for unintentional sin requiring restitution (along with restitution and payment of 20% fine)

Note: When more than one kind of offering was presented, the sequence was: (1) Sin offering or guilt offering, (2) burnt offering, (3) fellowship offering and grain offering (along with drink offering).

This sequence furnishes part of the spiritual significance of the sacrificial system. First, sin had to be dealt with (sin offering or guilt offering). Second, the worshipper committed himself completely to Yahweh (burnt offering and grain offering). Third, the socio-religious relationship, or spiritual communion, between Yahweh, the priest and the worshipper (fellowship offering) was re-established.

In other terms, there were sacrifices of expiation (sin offerings and guilt offerings), of consecration (burnt offerings and grain offerings), and of social and spiritual relationship (fellowship offerings, which included thanks offerings and freewill offerings).

Appendix 6: Weights and Measures in the Bible**Weight**

Talent	(60 minas)	75 Pounds	34 kg
Mina	(50 shekels)	1 1/4 Pounds	0.6 kg
Shekel	(2 bekas)	2/5 Ounce	11.5 g
Pim	(2/3 shekel)	1/3 Ounce	7.6 g
Beka	(10 gerah)	1/5 Ounce	6 g
Gerah		1/50 Ounce	0.6 g

Length

Cubit		18 Inches	46 cm
Span		9 Inches	23 cm
Handbreadth		3 Inches	7 cm

Capacity (dry measure)

Cor	(10 ephah)	6 Bushels	220 lt
Lethec	(5 ephah)	3 Bushels	110 lt
Ephah	(10 omers)	1/2 Bushel	22 lt
Seah	(1/3 ephah)	7 Quarts	7.3 lt
Omer	(1/10 ephah)	2 Quarts	2 lt
Cab	(1/18 ephah)	1/2 Pint	0.3 lt

Capacity (liquid measure)

Bath	(1 ephah)	6 Gallons	22 lt
Hin	(1/6 bath)	4 Quarts	4 lt
Log	(1/72 bath)	1/3 Quart	0.3 lt

Appendix 7: How to read and understand the Old Testament

It is quite evident that to understand the true relation between Yahweh and His chosen people, the Jews, (with promises of rewards and punishments for acting in ways we, Christians, can't often accept) is necessary to analyze the whole Old Testament; not only its written words, but also who has written what, for what a reason, for what a purpose and when.

Foreword

The main obstacle we encounter to clarify the basic concepts of the Old Testament is the nature itself of it, as it includes a wide variety of literary forms: narratives, poems, wisdom sayings, prophetic oracles, etc. It is a collection of writings, not a coherently organized theological treatise. Furthermore, the growth of this collection into the present day canon was a long, complicated process, with plenty of successive accretions.

The whole Bible, Old and New Testament, is in essence the history of Yahweh's interventions in the development of the human race. Interventions assuming forms and giving results deeply different in the period of the single nation (Israel - Old Testament) than in the period of the whole mankind (Christianity - New Testament).

By reading the Bible we have clear indications that Yahweh's personal intervention is the rare exception, not the normality. Furthermore, when He, the Creator of the Universe, intervenes in the matters of the world, His interventions are almost never direct and personal. Usually, behind His interventions there are some natural phenomena or events used by Yahweh to accomplish His plans. Yet sometime (a minimum number of times) He intervenes directly as, for example, when creating the human race; when choosing a particular population and some of its leaders and prophets; when conceiving His Son Jesus Christ; etc.

Fundamental differences between Old and New Testament

The Old Testament is the history first, of the Creation and then, of the vicissitudes of Israel, Yahweh's chosen people. It actually is -as also demonstrated by plenty of archaeological findings- a collection of books of biased history written in a way, the way of ancient times, which does not appear "historical" to modern readers. Anyway, the Bible speaks of Yahweh's influence on the life and behavior of a small population over a period of few millennia; life and behavior absolutely "terrestrial," that is, quite far from what they should have been.

In the New Testament Yahweh's direct intervention is referred to in what concerns the procreation, the baptism, the confirmation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, His Son and His Messiah. In everything else, the narration of the New Testament is conceptually different from the global narration of the Old Testament because, even if it refers -in the four Gospels- the history of Jesus Christ's preaching, it does so with a purely moral intent. Only the Book of Acts and the Epistles of Paul are a kind of "historical" narrations of the first Christians' vicissitudes.

The great difference is the fact that Christianity -the New Testament- applies to the whole world, without any distinction of country and race, while the Old Testament is only concerned with the -practical- history of a small population: Israel.

To note that the spiritual and moral concepts and principles introduced by Jesus Christ -in effect, only made clear and not "militarily" compulsory- are nothing else than those already present in the Old Testament where they are obscured -or made non understandable- by the structure of the human "traditions" developed around the True Law of Yahweh with the passing of time.

A consideration: To be comparable to the Old Testament, nowadays the "New Testament" would have to be a collection of books which, in this case, would have to include: 1) All the already existing New Testament's books. 2) A series of history books with the biased accounts of the expansion and the development of Christianity in the world, along with the vicissitudes of many populations, of their leaders and of their saints -the last ones corresponding to the Old Testament's prophets. 3) Some catechism books with all the rules, laws (dogmas, doctrines, etc.), traditions and liturgies developed in the last two millennia. This hypothetical collection of books would show how much "terrestrial" was and is the Christians' behavior, in spite of the New Testament's moral teaching, and would make much easier to understand the true moral meaning of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament: Israel's history

Reading the Old Testament, it is quite often hard to retrieve and understand what really happened as, even in the so-called "historical books" (such as 1 and 2 Kings or Ezra) the writers were mainly concerned with their religious and theological significance and have described the various characters according to their conformity to religious stance. In the Old Testament, the events are always "interpreted," never rendered with photographic accuracy.

Israel's history can be divided in two fundamental periods: The Period of

the Ancestors (from Abraham to the end of slavery in Egypt) and the Period of Life as a Nation (from the escape out of Egypt to the completion of the reconstruction of the Temple after the end of the Babylonian Captivity).

Period of the Ancestors: The stories about the great ancestors of Israel -the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob- give an idea of Near Eastern life in the second millennium BC. The Patriarchs have been historical persons, and the accounts about them contain names, legal customs and other informations that are confirmed by contemporary extra-biblical documents and archeological findings. But the narratives about the Patriarchs are not the kind of solid factual writings from which modern historians could develop a coherent history of Israel's beginning.

Period of Life as a Nation: The real history of Israel begins in the early thirteen century BC with the people's escape from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. And it is clear that it would be difficult to explain Israel's history and religion without recognizing the historical reality of the exodus and of the leadership of Moses. The forty years of wandering in the desert are easily explained considering that a population accustomed to slavery could not have been in condition to military conquer a country suitable for their future existence. They had to wait for a new, free generation psychologically able to fight. And, in the meantime, their religion was taking shape, including even catastrophic events seen as directly sent by Yahweh. The entrance in the land of Canaan took place in the late thirteen century BC and is symbolically depicted in the biblical account. In effect, Israel did not gain complete control of the land until the time of King David. In the meantime, not only many Canaanite cities did remain unconquered, but also there were invasions by the Philistines, Moabites, Midianites and Ammonites. And all the events of this period, the period of the Judges, are depicted in the Old Testament as direct results of the people's obedience/dissobedience to Yahweh. Then the period of the Kings Saul, David and Solomon (1010 - 930 BC) was marked by military and political success and, as a consequence, it is referred to as a period of obedience to Yahweh, a period gifted by His benevolence. During this period, King David brought political and religious unity to Israel by making Jerusalem its capital. The sagas of the Patriarchs, the Exodus and the Judges were revised, collected and put in written form at that time. King Solomon built Jerusalem Temple making it for ever the center of Israel's religion. The political and social disasters following Solomon's death (the split of Israel in two kingdoms and their further vicissitudes) were attributed to Solomon and his successors' sins. Anyway, all the relevant accounts are true relations of historical facts, even if always seen through the religious optic of people's obedi-

ce-disobedience / Yahweh's benevolence-punishment. The same considerations apply to the following periods, till the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the people's deportation, followed by the return in Israel and the restoration of Jerusalem Temple and City (even if always under Persian domination). And the Bible's account stops there, and does not refer the fact that Israel was never more free (Persian, Hellenistic -with Alexander the Great-, Ptolemaic -Egypt-, Seleucidic -Syria-, Hasmonean, and finally Roman domination).

Conclusions

From what said above, it clearly results that the Old Testament represents the political history of the people of Israel intertwined with the history of the development of its religion. And it is also clear that, to understand its true religious and moral meaning we have to use the "lens" of the New Testament, as only in this way we can separate the True Law of Yahweh from the Old testament's imposing superstructure of human rules and traditions. [In the New Testament, the True Law of Yahweh (a "Law" of moral principles, not of rules) appears much clearly than in the Old Testament, even if it is still too often concealed by considerations derived from Old Testament's ideas and has to be purged of the New Testament's own superstructure of human rules and traditions developed during the last two millennia].

The True Law of Yahweh

In the Gospels the True Law of Yahweh is stated with total clarity:

You'll be fond of [Yahweh] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind; and you'll be fond of your neighbor as of yourself. There is no commandment greater than these. (Mark 12: 29-31; Matthew 22:37-39; Luke 10:27)

Furthermore, the Gospels clarify the relation of Jesus Christ's teaching with the Old Testament:

All the [Books of the] Law and the [Books of the] Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matthew 22:40)

To be fond of your neighbor as of yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. (Mark 12:33)

I [Yahweh] desire mercy, not sacrifice. (Matthew 12:7, quoting from Hosea 6:6, that is, from the Book of the Old Testament prophet Hosea)

From "Miscellanea" (www.ccofuc.com): **The Old Testament: What does it represent? Which is its true meaning?**

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