



four hundred ten; other vessels, one thousand; <sup>11</sup>the total of the gold and silver vessels was five thousand four hundred.

All these Sheshbazzar brought up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.

### Read Ezra 2

Though this chapter identifies three groups of returned exiles (the laity, priests, and Levites), the focus is on those who have specific roles in temple worship. The book of Ezra considers the restoration of temple worship an essential first step in the renewal of Jewish life.

**Reflect:** A primary concern for priests and people ought to be the church's liturgy. Christian worship should be characterized by reverence, beauty, and enthusiastic participation. Those who have liturgical ministries should carry them out with the utmost care.

**Pray:** Thank God for the opportunity to join in the church's liturgy. Ask for the gift of joyful enthusiasm as you worship with the Christian faithful.

**Act:** Add your voice to the prayer of the church at the Sunday liturgy. Offer to use your talents in contributing to your parish's weekly worship.

### List of the Returned Exiles

**2** Now these were the people of the province who came from those captive exiles whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia; they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, all to their own towns. <sup>2</sup>They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

The number of the Israelite people: <sup>3</sup>the descendants of Parosh, two thousand one hundred seventy-two. <sup>4</sup>Of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy-two. <sup>5</sup>Of Arah, seven hundred seventy-five. <sup>6</sup>Of Pahath-moab, namely the descendants of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred twelve. <sup>7</sup>Of Elam, one thousand two hundred fifty-four. <sup>8</sup>Of Zattu, nine hundred forty-five. <sup>9</sup>Of Zaccai, seven hundred sixty. <sup>10</sup>Of Bani, six hundred forty-two. <sup>11</sup>Of Bebai, six hundred twenty-three. <sup>12</sup>Of Azgad, one thousand two hundred twenty-two. <sup>13</sup>Of Adonikam, six hundred sixty-six. <sup>14</sup>Of Bigvai, two thousand fifty-six. <sup>15</sup>Of Adin, four hundred fifty-four. <sup>16</sup>Of Ater, namely of Hezekiah, ninety-eight. <sup>17</sup>Of Bezai, three hundred twenty-three. <sup>18</sup>Of Jorah, one hundred twelve. <sup>19</sup>Of Hashum, two hundred twenty-three. <sup>20</sup>Of Gibbar, ninety-five. <sup>21</sup>Of Bethlehem, one hundred twenty-three. <sup>22</sup>The people of Netophah, fifty-six. <sup>23</sup>Of Anathoth, one hundred twenty-eight. <sup>24</sup>The descendants of Azmaveth, forty-two. <sup>25</sup>Of Kiriatharim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred forty-three. <sup>26</sup>Of Ramah and Geba, six hundred twenty-one. <sup>27</sup>The people of Michmas, one hundred twenty-two. <sup>28</sup>Of Bethel and Ai, two hundred twenty-three. <sup>29</sup>The descendants of Nebo, fifty-two. <sup>30</sup>Of Magbish, one hundred fifty-six. <sup>31</sup>Of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred fifty-four. <sup>32</sup>Of Harim, three hundred twenty. <sup>33</sup>Of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty-five. <sup>34</sup>Of Jericho, three hundred forty-five. <sup>35</sup>Of Senaah, three thousand six hundred thirty.

<sup>36</sup>The priests: the descendants of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy-three. <sup>37</sup>Of Immer, one thousand fifty-two. <sup>38</sup>Of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred forty-seven. <sup>39</sup>Of Harim, one thousand seventeen.

<sup>40</sup>The Levites: the descendants of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the descendants of Hodaviah, seventy-four. <sup>41</sup>The singers: the descendants of Asaph, one hundred twenty-eight. <sup>42</sup>The descendants of the gatekeepers: of

Shallum, of Ater, of Talmon, of Akkub, of Hatita, and of Shobai, in all one hundred thirty-nine.

43 The temple servants: the descendants of Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, <sup>44</sup> Keros, Siaha, Padon, <sup>45</sup> Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, <sup>46</sup> Hagab, Shamlai, Hanan, <sup>47</sup> Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, <sup>48</sup> Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, <sup>49</sup> Uzza, Paseah, Besai, <sup>50</sup> Asnah, Meunim, Nephisim, <sup>51</sup> Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, <sup>52</sup> Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, <sup>53</sup> Barkos, Sisera, Temah, <sup>54</sup> Neziah, and Hatipha.

55 The descendants of Solomon's servants: Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, <sup>56</sup> Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, <sup>57</sup> Shephatiah, Hattil, Pochereth-hazzebaim, and Ami.

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

59 The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer, though they could not prove their families or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel: <sup>60</sup> the descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda, six hundred fifty-two. <sup>61</sup> Also, of the descendants of the priests: the descendants of Habaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai (who had married one of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name).

<sup>62</sup> These looked for their entries in the genealogical records, but they were not found there, and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean; <sup>63</sup> the governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.

64 The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred sixty, <sup>65</sup> besides their male and female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty-seven; and they had two hundred male and female singers. <sup>66</sup> They had seven hundred thirty-six horses, two hundred forty-five mules, <sup>67</sup> four hundred thirty-five camels, and six thousand seven hundred twenty donkeys.

68 As soon as they came to the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, some of the heads of families made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site. <sup>69</sup> According to their resources they gave to the building fund sixty-one thousand darics of gold, five thousand minas of silver, and one hundred priestly robes.

70 The priests, the Levites, and some of the people lived in Jerusalem and its vicinity;<sup>a</sup> and the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all Israel in their towns.

### Read Ezra 3:1–7

The restoration of worship in Jerusalem had two phases. First, a new altar was built. This allowed for the resumption of sacrificial offerings. Sacrificial worship was at the heart of religion in ancient Israel. The people believed that such worship ensured the fertility of the land and protection from external enemies.

**Reflect:** What do you expect from your participation in the liturgy? Are these expectations met? Think about a moving experience you had during the liturgy. What made that experience so moving?

### Worship Restored at Jerusalem

**3** When the seventh month came, and the Israelites were in the towns, the people gathered together in Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> Then Jeshua son of Jozadak, with his fellow priests, and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his kin set out to build the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as prescribed in the law of Moses the man of God. <sup>3</sup> They set up the altar on its foundation, because they were in dread of the neighboring peoples, and they offered burnt offerings upon it to the LORD, morning and evening. <sup>4</sup> And they kept the festival of booths,<sup>b</sup> as prescribed, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number according to the ordinance, as required for each day, <sup>5</sup> and after that the regular burnt offerings, the offerings at the new moon and at all the sacred festivals of the LORD, and the offerings of everyone who made a freewill offering to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD. But the foundation of the

<sup>a</sup> 1 Esdras 5.46: Heb lacks *lived in Jerusalem and its vicinity*

<sup>b</sup> Or *tabernacles*; Heb *succoth*

**Pray:** Pray that you may have an authentic experience of God as a result of your participation in the liturgy. Pray for those who prepare for and preside at the liturgy, that their service may help worshippers feel God's presence in their lives.

**Act:** Become a student of the church's liturgy. Try to learn something about the history of the church's worship and the significance of its rituals, and seek out ways in which the experience of worship could be more significant for all participants.

### Read Ezra 3:8–13

The second phase in restoring Jewish worship in Jerusalem was a more complex project: the rebuilding of the temple. The people celebrated the laying of the foundations for the building because it was a harbinger of greater things to come. The people who remembered the first temple, however, wept because they saw that the foundations of the building that would replace it indicated that the new building would be much more modest than its predecessor.

**Reflect:** We live in a time of consolidating and closing of parishes. What does this say about the future of the church? Is this a time for weeping or for identifying a new opportunity?

**Pray:** Pray for the church in North America because this is, in many places, a time of restructuring, diminishment, and consolidation. Pray that people who weep at this time may find hope for the future of the church.

**Act:** Don't give in to "diminishment thinking." The church's mission still needs to advance. Find some aspect of that mission to which you can offer your contribution.

temple of the LORD was not yet laid. <sup>7</sup>So they gave money to the masons and the carpenters, and food, drink, and oil to the Sidonians and the Tyrians to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from King Cyrus of Persia.

### Foundation Laid for the Temple

8 In the second year after their arrival at the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak made a beginning, together with the rest of their people, the priests and the Levites and all who had come to Jerusalem from the captivity. They appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to have the oversight of the work on the house of the LORD. <sup>9</sup>And Jeshua with his sons and his kin, and Kadmiel and his sons, Binnui and Hodaviah<sup>a</sup> along with the sons of Henadad, the Levites, their sons and kin, together took charge of the workers in the house of God.

10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the LORD with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; <sup>11</sup>and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD,

"For he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever toward  
Israel."

And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. <sup>12</sup>But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy, <sup>13</sup>so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away.

### Resistance to Rebuilding the Temple

**4** When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the LORD, the God of Israel, <sup>2</sup>they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of families and said to them, "Let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of King Esar-haddon of Assyria who brought us here." <sup>3</sup>But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of families in Israel said to them, "You shall have no part

<sup>a</sup> Compare 2.40; Neh 7.43; 1 Esdras 5.58; Heb sons of Judah

## Read Ezra 4

The project of rebuilding the temple rekindles old animosities between the Samaritans and the Jews. The Samaritans' offer to help with the project is rebuffed by the Jews. As a result, the Samaritans try to have the project scuttled by the Persian authorities.

**Reflect:** Collaboration is the key to fulfilling the church's mission—collaboration between clergy and laity, men and women, Protestant and Catholic. That mission is not the private possession of one group. Our common baptism calls us to join together in proclaiming the good news.

**Pray:** Pray that God may move hearts to transcend rivalries and distrust. Bringing about the reign of God is the responsibility of all God's people.

**Acts:** Acquire the skills to be a reconciler—someone who can bring people together. Look for opportunities to facilitate collaboration in your parish community. Learn how to put the church's mission first, before personal considerations.

with us in building a house to our God; but we alone will build to the LORD, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus of Persia has commanded us.”

4 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and made them afraid to build, <sup>5</sup> and they bribed officials to frustrate their plan throughout the reign of King Cyrus of Persia and until the reign of King Darius of Persia.

## Rebuilding of Jerusalem Opposed

6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, in his accession year, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

7 And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam and Mithredath and Tabeel and the rest of their associates wrote to King Artaxerxes of Persia; the letter was written in Aramaic and translated.<sup>a</sup> <sup>8</sup> Rehum the royal deputy and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to King Artaxerxes as follows <sup>9</sup> (then Rehum the royal deputy, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their associates, the judges, the envoys, the officials, the Persians, the people of Erech, the Babylonians, the people of Susa, that is, the Elamites, <sup>10</sup> and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar deported and settled in the cities of Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River wrote—and now <sup>11</sup> this is a copy of the letter that they sent):

“To King Artaxerxes: Your servants, the people of the province Beyond the River, send greeting. And now <sup>12</sup> may it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you to us have gone to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city; they are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. <sup>13</sup> Now may it be known to the king that, if this city is rebuilt and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and the royal revenue will be reduced. <sup>14</sup> Now because we share the salt of the palace and it is not fitting for us to witness the king's dishonor, therefore we send and inform the king, <sup>15</sup> so that a search may be made in the annals of your ancestors. You will discover in the annals that this is a rebellious city, hurtful to kings and provinces, and that sedition was stirred up in it from long ago. On that account this city was laid waste. <sup>16</sup> We make known to the king that, if this city is rebuilt and its walls finished, you will then have no possession in the province Beyond the River.”

17 The king sent an answer: “To Rehum the royal deputy and Shimshai the scribe and the rest of their associates who live in Samaria and in the rest of the province Beyond the River, greeting. And now <sup>18</sup> the letter that you sent to us has been read in translation

<sup>a</sup> Heb adds *in Aramaic*, indicating that 4.8–6.18 is in Aramaic. Another interpretation is *The letter was written in the Aramaic script and set forth in the Aramaic language*

<sup>a</sup> Aram adds *the prophet*



before me. <sup>19</sup> So I made a decree, and someone searched and discovered that this city has risen against kings from long ago, and that rebellion and sedition have been made in it. <sup>20</sup> Jerusalem has had mighty kings who ruled over the whole province Beyond the River, to whom tribute, custom, and toll were paid. <sup>21</sup> Therefore issue an order that these people be made to cease, and that this city not be rebuilt, until I make a decree. <sup>22</sup> Moreover, take care not to be slack

in this matter; why should damage grow to the hurt of the king?"

<sup>23</sup> Then when the copy of King Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum and the scribe Shimshai and their associates, they hurried to the Jews in Jerusalem and by force and power made them cease. <sup>24</sup> At that time the work on the house of God in Jerusalem stopped and was discontinued until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.

### Read Ezra 5:1—6:12

A letter sent by a sympathetic Persian official to King Darius leads to the king's decree approving the rebuilding of the temple. Cooperation between Judah's priests and prophets reflects a unity of purpose between elements of Judah's religious leadership that had at times been antagonistic toward each other. The temple project will move ahead.

**Reflect:** The church's mission can move ahead when its hierarchical and charismatic leaders are in harmony. The goal of all the church's leaders ought to be the same: the spread of the gospel to all people, though the strategies employed to attain this goal may be different.

**Pray:** Ask the Holy Spirit to animate the ministries of all the church's leaders so that these ministries may be authentic and effective.

**Act:** Take an active role in the life of your parish, but also be ready to contribute to efforts of other groups of believers that seek to spread the gospel through social, educational, and peace-building projects.

### Restoration of the Temple Resumed

**5** Now the prophets, Haggai<sup>a</sup> and Zechariah son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. <sup>2</sup> Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jozadak set out to rebuild the house of God in Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them.

<sup>3</sup> At the same time Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and their associates came to them and spoke to them thus, "Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?" <sup>4</sup> They<sup>b</sup> also asked them this, "What are the names of the men who are building this building?" <sup>5</sup> But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, and they did not stop them until a report reached Darius and then answer was returned by letter in reply to it.

<sup>6</sup> The copy of the letter that Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai and his associates the envoys who were in the province Beyond the River sent to King Darius; <sup>7</sup> they sent him a report, in which was written as follows: "To Darius the king, all peace! <sup>8</sup> May it be known to the king that we went to the province of Judah, to the house of the great God. It is being built of hewn stone, and timber is laid in the walls; this work is being done diligently and prospers in their hands. <sup>9</sup> Then we spoke to those elders and asked them, 'Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?' <sup>10</sup> We also asked them their names, for your information, so that we might write down the names of the men at their head. <sup>11</sup> This was their reply to us: 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished. <sup>12</sup> But because our ancestors had angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the Chaldean, who

<sup>b</sup> Gk Syr: Aram We

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Aram uncertain

destroyed this house and carried away the people to Babylonia. <sup>13</sup> However, King Cyrus of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt. <sup>14</sup> Moreover, the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem and had brought into the temple of Babylon, these King Cyrus took out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor. <sup>15</sup> He said to him, “Take these vessels; go and

put them in the temple in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site.” <sup>16</sup> Then this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem; and from that time until now it has been under construction, and it is not yet finished.’ <sup>17</sup> And now, if it seems good to the king, have a search made in the royal archives there in Babylon, to see whether a decree was issued by King Cyrus for the rebuilding of this house of God in Jerusalem. Let the king send us his pleasure in this matter.”

### Read Ezra 6:13–22

Despite all the obstacles that could have prevented the rebuilding of the temple, the project was completed. The rededication of the temple meant that the returned exiles could celebrate the Passover. Indeed, they saw their return to Jerusalem as an act of divine liberation akin to God’s freeing of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt.

**Reflect:** God’s liberating power continues to manifest itself in the lives of believers. God offers us freedom from the power of sin and death if we repent and believe in the gospel.

**Pray:** We ought to thank God for calling us to faith in Jesus Christ and we ask God to help us lead lives worthy of the gospel.

**Act:** Do we live like people who have been set free? The choices we make in life must show that the power of Jesus Christ has freed us from slavery to selfishness and sin.

### The Decree of Darius

**6** Then King Darius made a decree, and they searched the archives where the documents were stored in Babylon. <sup>2</sup> But it was in Ecbatana, the capital in the province of Media, that a scroll was found on which this was written: “A record. <sup>3</sup> In the first year of his reign, King Cyrus issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices are offered and burnt offerings are brought;<sup>a</sup> its height shall be sixty cubits and its width sixty cubits, <sup>4</sup> with three courses of hewn stones and one course of timber; let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. <sup>5</sup> Moreover, let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple in Jerusalem, each to its place; you shall put them in the house of God.”

<sup>6</sup> “Now you, Tattenai, governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and you, their associates, the envoys in the province Beyond the River, keep away; <sup>7</sup> let the work on this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews rebuild this house of God on its site. <sup>8</sup> Moreover I make a decree regarding what you shall do for these elders of the Jews for the rebuilding of this house of God: the cost is to be paid to these people, in full and without delay, from the royal revenue, the tribute of the province Beyond the River. <sup>9</sup> Whatever is needed—young bulls, rams, or sheep for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, or oil, as the priests in Jerusalem require—let that be given to them day by day without fail, <sup>10</sup> so that they may offer pleasing sacrifices to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and his children. <sup>11</sup> Furthermore I decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of the house of the perpetrator, who then shall be impaled on it. The house

<sup>a</sup> Syr Vg 1 Esdras 8.9: *Aram Perfect*

shall be made a dunghill. <sup>12</sup>May the God who has established his name there overthrow any king or people that shall put forth a hand to alter this, or to destroy this house of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, make a decree; let it be done with all diligence.”

### Completion and Dedication of the Temple

<sup>13</sup> Then, according to the word sent by King Darius, Tattenai, the governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates did with all diligence what King Darius had ordered. <sup>14</sup> So the elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of the prophet Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo. They finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus, Darius, and King Artaxerxes of Persia; <sup>15</sup> and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

<sup>16</sup> The people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. <sup>17</sup> They offered at the dedication of this house of God one hundred

bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. <sup>18</sup> Then they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their courses for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses.

### The Passover Celebrated

<sup>19</sup> On the fourteenth day of the first month the returned exiles kept the passover. <sup>20</sup> For both the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were clean. So they killed the passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves. <sup>21</sup> It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by all who had joined them and separated themselves from the pollutions of the nations of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>22</sup> With joy they celebrated the festival of unleavened bread seven days; for the LORD had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

### The Coming and Work of Ezra

**7** After this, in the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, Ezra son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, <sup>2</sup> son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, <sup>3</sup> son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, <sup>4</sup> son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, <sup>5</sup> son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of the chief priest Aaron— <sup>6</sup> this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the law of Moses that the LORD the God of Israel had given; and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was upon him.

<sup>7</sup> Some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants also went up to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. <sup>8</sup> They came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. <sup>9</sup> On the first day of the first month the journey up from Babylon was begun, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the gracious hand of his God was upon him. <sup>10</sup> For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel.



### Read Ezra 7

The Persian king sought to pacify his Jewish subjects by making their ancestral laws the imperial law in Judah. To this end, he sent Ezra to instruct people in the Torah. The king believed that living according to this law would make the Jews good and peaceful subjects of his empire.

**Reflect:** Living according to the ideals of the gospel will help us not only maintain but also enhance the well-being of the communities in which we live. The greatest contribution we can make to these communities is living an authentic Christian life.

**Pray:** We ask for the grace of the Spirit to live the ideals of Jesus Christ, for this will help us be a blessing to the people with whom we live.

**Act:** Ask yourself how many people think of you as a source of blessing in their lives. Resolve to live the ideals of the gospel more faithfully.

### The Letter of Artaxerxes to Ezra

11 This is a copy of the letter that King Artaxerxes gave to the priest Ezra, the scribe, a scholar of the text of the commandments of the LORD and his statutes for Israel: <sup>12</sup>“Artaxerxes, king of kings, to the priest Ezra, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven: Peace.<sup>a</sup> And now <sup>13</sup>I decree that any of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom who freely offers to go to Jerusalem may go with you. <sup>14</sup>For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your hand, <sup>15</sup>and also to convey the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, <sup>16</sup>with all the silver and gold that you shall find in the whole province of Babylonia, and with the freewill offerings of the people and the priests, given willingly for the house of their God in Jerusalem. <sup>17</sup>With this money, then, you shall with all diligence buy bulls, rams, and lambs, and their grain offerings and their drink offerings, and you shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God in Jerusalem. <sup>18</sup>Whatever seems good to you and your colleagues to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do, according to the will of your God. <sup>19</sup>The vessels that have been given you for the service of the house of your God, you shall deliver before the God of Jerusalem. <sup>20</sup>And whatever else is required for the house of your God, which you are responsible for providing, you may provide out of the king’s treasury.

21 “I, King Artaxerxes, decree to all the treasurers in the province Beyond the River: Whatever the priest Ezra, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, requires of you, let it be done with all diligence, <sup>22</sup>up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred cors of wheat, one hundred baths<sup>b</sup> of wine, one hundred baths<sup>b</sup> of oil, and unlimited salt. <sup>23</sup>Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of the God of heaven, or wrath will come upon the realm of the king and his heirs. <sup>24</sup>We also notify you that it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on any of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the doorkeepers, the temple servants, or other servants of this house of God.

25 “And you, Ezra, according to the God-given wisdom you possess, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province Beyond the River who know the laws of your God; and you shall teach those who do not know them. <sup>26</sup>All who will not obey the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be strictly executed on them, whether for

<sup>b</sup> A Heb measure of volume

<sup>a</sup> Gk 1 Esdras 8.32: Heb lacks *of Zattu*

death or for banishment or for confiscation of their goods or for imprisonment.”

27 Blessed be the LORD, the God of our ancestors, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king to glorify the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, <sup>28</sup> and who ex-

tended to me steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king’s mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered leaders from Israel to go up with me.

### Read Ezra 8

Ezra led more than one thousand people from Babylon to Jerusalem. After making a spiritual preparation for the journey, the caravan set out for the holy city. Prominent among the returnees were the priests and Levites, who made special sacrifices in the temple at the end of their journey.

**Reflect:** The priests and Levites had a special role in the religious life of the Jewish people. Their service in the temple was central to that life. They helped the people of Judah give expression to their gratitude to the God who had brought them back from exile. Priests and religious have a comparable role in the life of the Christian community.

**Pray:** Pray for vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

**Act:** Speak positively about a life of service in the priesthood and religious life as a vocational choice. Encourage young people to consider making this choice.

### Heads of Families Who Returned with Ezra

**8** These are their family heads, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of King Artaxerxes: <sup>2</sup>Of the descendants of Phinehas, Gershom. Of Ithamar, Daniel. Of David, Hattush, <sup>3</sup>of the descendants of Shecaniah. Of Parosh, Zechariah, with whom were registered one hundred fifty males. <sup>4</sup>Of the descendants of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai son of Zerariah, and with him two hundred males. <sup>5</sup>Of the descendants of Zattu,<sup>a</sup> Shecaniah son of Jahaziel, and with him three hundred males. <sup>6</sup>Of the descendants of Adin, Ebed son of Jonathan, and with him fifty males. <sup>7</sup>Of the descendants of Elam, Jeshaiah son of Athaliah, and with him seventy males. <sup>8</sup>Of the descendants of Shephatiah, Zebadiah son of Michael, and with him eighty males. <sup>9</sup>Of the descendants of Joab, Obadiah son of Jehiel, and with him two hundred eighteen males. <sup>10</sup>Of the descendants of Bani,<sup>b</sup> Shelomith son of Josiphiah, and with him one hundred sixty males. <sup>11</sup>Of the descendants of Bebai, Zechariah son of Bebai, and with him twenty-eight males. <sup>12</sup>Of the descendants of Azgad, Johanan son of Hakkatan, and with him one hundred ten males. <sup>13</sup>Of the descendants of Adonikam, those who came later, their names being Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them sixty males. <sup>14</sup>Of the descendants of Bigvai, Uthai and Zac-cur, and with them seventy males.

### Servants for the Temple

15 I gathered them by the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the descendants of Levi. <sup>16</sup>Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were leaders, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, who were wise, <sup>17</sup>and sent them to Iddo, the leader at the place called Casiphia, telling them what to say to Iddo and his colleagues the temple servants at Casiphia, namely, to send us ministers for the house of our God. <sup>18</sup>Since the gracious hand of our God was upon us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the descendants of Mahli son of Levi son of Israel, namely Sherebiah, with his sons and kin, eighteen; <sup>19</sup>also

<sup>b</sup> Gk 1 Esdras 8.36: Heb lacks *Bani*

<sup>a</sup> Or *might fast*

Hashabiah and with him Jeshaiiah of the descendants of Merari, with his kin and their sons, twenty; <sup>20</sup> besides two hundred twenty of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites. These were all mentioned by name.

### Fasting and Prayer for Protection

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might deny ourselves<sup>a</sup> before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our possessions. <sup>22</sup> For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and cavalry to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king that the hand of our God is gracious to all who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all who forsake him. <sup>23</sup> So we fasted and petitioned our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

### Gifts for the Temple

24 Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests: Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kin with them. <sup>25</sup> And I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king, his counselors, his lords, and all Israel there present had offered; <sup>26</sup> I weighed out into their hand six hundred fifty talents of silver, and one hundred silver vessels worth... talents,<sup>b</sup> and one hundred talents of gold, <sup>27</sup> twenty gold bowls worth a thousand darics, and two vessels of fine polished bronze as precious as gold. <sup>28</sup> And I said to them, "You are holy to the LORD, and the vessels are holy; and the silver and

the gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of your ancestors. <sup>29</sup> Guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of families in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the LORD." <sup>30</sup> So the priests and the Levites took over the silver, the gold, and the vessels as they were weighed out, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God.

### The Return to Jerusalem

31 Then we left the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem; the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and from ambushes along the way. <sup>32</sup> We came to Jerusalem and remained there three days. <sup>33</sup> On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver, the gold, and the vessels were weighed into the hands of the priest Meremoth son of Uriah, and with him was Eleazar son of Phinehas, and with them were the Levites, Jozabad son of Jeshua and Noadiah son of Binnui. <sup>34</sup> The total was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded.

35 At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin offering twelve male goats; all this was a burnt offering to the LORD. <sup>36</sup> They also delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps and to the governors of the province Beyond the River; and they supported the people and the house of God.

### Denunciation of Mixed Marriages

**9** After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. <sup>2</sup> For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of

<sup>b</sup> The number of talents is lacking

<sup>a</sup> Heb *our God*

## Read Ezra 9

Ezra was worried that the Jews would turn away from their ancestral religious traditions and assimilate the cultural and religious values of the nations in the region. He confessed the failures of ancient Israel to resist the temptation to compromise and he asked that God would help the people of Judah to remain faithful. Assimilation would mean the end of the Jewish people.

**Reflect:** Living by gospel values sometimes places us as odds with the values of our culture. Our calling is to remain faithful to the gospel despite the pressures to compromise. The gospel must make a difference in the way we live.

**Pray:** Like Ezra, confess past failures. Pray for pardon for having been too ready to compromise.

**Act:** Examine carefully the moral choices you have made recently and ask whether they reflect gospel values.

the lands, and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way.”<sup>3</sup> When I heard this, I tore my garment and my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled.<sup>4</sup> Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice.

## Ezra’s Prayer

5 At the evening sacrifice I got up from my fasting, with my garments and my mantle torn, and fell on my knees, spread out my hands to the LORD my God,<sup>6</sup> and said,

“O my God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.<sup>7</sup> From the days of our ancestors to this day we have been deep in guilt, and for our iniquities we, our kings, and our priests have been handed over to the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plundering, and to utter shame, as is now the case.<sup>8</sup> But now for a brief moment favor has been shown by the LORD our God, who has left us a remnant, and given us a stake in his holy place, in order that he<sup>a</sup> may brighten our eyes and grant us a little sustenance in our slavery.<sup>9</sup> For we are slaves; yet our God has not forsaken us in our slavery, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to give us new life to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judea and Jerusalem.

10 “And now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken your commandments,<sup>11</sup> which you commanded by your servants the prophets, saying, ‘The land that you are entering to possess is a land unclean with the pollutions of the peoples of the lands, with their abominations. They have filled it from end to end with their uncleanness.<sup>12</sup> Therefore do not give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters for your sons, and never seek their peace or prosperity, so that you may be strong and eat the good of the land and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever.’<sup>13</sup> After all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, seeing that you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserved and have given us such a remnant as this,<sup>14</sup> shall we break your commandments again and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you destroy us without remnant or survivor?<sup>15</sup> O LORD, God of Israel, you are just, but we have escaped as a remnant, as is now the case. Here we are before you in our guilt, though no one can face you because of this.”

<sup>a</sup> 1 Esdras 9.2: Heb *where he went*

## Read Ezra 10

Ezra is able to persuade his fellow Jews of the dangers of assimilation. They agree to remain committed to their ancestral religious traditions, going so far as sending away their Gentile spouses and children. The small and powerless Jewish community in Jerusalem has become so fearful of assimilation that its members take this extreme step to preserve their identity.

**Reflect:** How far are we prepared to go in order to maintain our commitment to Jesus and the gospel? What steps are we ready to take to preserve our baptismal identity as children of God?

**Pray:** Pray for the insight to recognize the temptation to compromise and the strength to resist that temptation.

**Act:** What are the hard choices you have to make in order to maintain your Christian identity? Examine your priorities and values to see if they are drawn from your commitment to Jesus and the gospel.

## The People's Response

**10** While Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a very great assembly of men, women, and children gathered to him out of Israel; the people also wept bitterly. <sup>2</sup> Shecaniah son of Jehiel, of the descendants of Elam, addressed Ezra, saying, "We have broken faith with our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land, but even now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. <sup>3</sup> So now let us make a covenant with our God to send away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. <sup>4</sup> Take action, for it is your duty, and we are with you; be strong, and do it." <sup>5</sup> Then Ezra stood up and made the leading priests, the Levites, and all Israel swear that they would do as had been said. So they swore.

## Foreign Wives and Their Children Rejected

<sup>6</sup> Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God, and went to the chamber of Jehohanan son of Eliashib, where he spent the night.<sup>a</sup> He did not eat bread or drink water, for he was mourning over the faithlessness of the exiles. <sup>7</sup> They made a proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the returned exiles that they should assemble at Jerusalem, <sup>8</sup> and that if any did not come within three days, by order of the officials and the elders all their property should be forfeited, and they themselves banned from the congregation of the exiles.

<sup>9</sup> Then all the people of Judah and Benjamin assembled at Jerusalem within the three days; it was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month. All the people sat in the open square before the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of the heavy rain. <sup>10</sup> Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have trespassed and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. <sup>11</sup> Now make confession to the LORD the God of your ancestors, and do his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives." <sup>12</sup> Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, "It is so; we must do as you have said. <sup>13</sup> But the people are many, and it is a time of heavy rain; we cannot stand in the open. Nor is this a task for one day or for two, for many of us have transgressed in this matter. <sup>14</sup> Let our officials represent the whole assembly, and let all in our towns who have taken foreign wives come at appointed times, and with them the elders and judges of every town, until the fierce wrath of our God on this account is averted from us." <sup>15</sup> Only Jonathan son of Asahel and

<sup>a</sup> 1 Esdras 9:16: Syr: Heb *And there were*



Jahzeiah son of Tikvah opposed this, and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levites supported them.

16 Then the returned exiles did so. Ezra the priest selected men,<sup>a</sup> heads of families, according to their families, each of them designated by name. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to examine the matter. <sup>17</sup> By the first day of the first month they had come to the end of all the men who had married foreign women.

18 There were found of the descendants of the priests who had married foreign women, of the descendants of Jeshua son of Jozadak and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. <sup>19</sup> They pledged themselves to send away their wives, and their guilt offering was a ram of the flock for their guilt. <sup>20</sup> Of the descendants of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah. <sup>21</sup> Of the descendants of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah. <sup>22</sup> Of the descendants of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasa.

23 Of the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiiah (that is, Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer. <sup>24</sup> Of the singers: Eliashib. Of the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

25 And of Israel: of the descendants of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malchijah, Mijamin,

Eleazar, Hashabiah,<sup>b</sup> and Benaiah. <sup>26</sup> Of the descendants of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.

<sup>27</sup> Of the descendants of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza. <sup>28</sup> Of the descendants of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

<sup>29</sup> Of the descendants of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth. <sup>30</sup> Of the descendants of Pahathmoab: Adna, Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

<sup>31</sup> Of the descendants of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, <sup>32</sup> Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. <sup>33</sup> Of the descendants of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei. <sup>34</sup> Of the descendants of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, <sup>35</sup> Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi, <sup>36</sup> Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, <sup>37</sup> Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu.

<sup>38</sup> Of the descendants of Binnui:<sup>c</sup> Shimei, <sup>39</sup> Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, <sup>40</sup> Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, <sup>41</sup> Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, <sup>42</sup> Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. <sup>43</sup> Of the descendants of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah. <sup>44</sup> All these had married foreign women, and they sent them away with their children.<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> selected Ezra.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Esdras 9.26 Gk: Heb *Malchijah*

<sup>c</sup> Gk: Heb *Bani, Binnui*

<sup>d</sup> 1 Esdras 9.36; meaning of Heb uncertain