



READING GUIDE — WEEK 19

EZRA: THE RETURN HOME

Ezra 1-6; Haggai 1—2; Zechariah 1, 8

Ezra 1

CYRUS ALLOWS THE EXILES TO RETURN

1 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the LORD fulfilled the prophecy he had given through Jeremiah. He stirred the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom:

2 "This is what King Cyrus of Persia says:

"The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.³ Any of you who are his people may go to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you!⁴ Wherever this Jewish remnant is found, let their neighbors contribute toward their expenses by giving them silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock, as well as a voluntary offering for the Temple of God in Jerusalem."

5 Then God stirred the hearts of the priests and Levites and the leaders of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of the LORD.⁶ And all their neighbors assisted by giving them articles of silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock. They gave them many valuable gifts in addition to all the voluntary offerings.

7 King Cyrus himself brought out the articles that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the LORD's Temple in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his own gods.⁸ Cyrus directed Mithredath, the treasurer of Persia, to count these items and present them to Sheshbazzar, the leader of the exiles returning to Judah.

9 This is a list of the items that were returned:

gold basins	30
silver basins	1,000
silver incense burners	29
gold bowls	30
silver bowls	410
other items	1,000

11 In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and silver. Sheshbazzar brought all of these along when the exiles went from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Ezra 2

EXILES WHO RETURNED WITH ZERUBBABEL

1 Here is the list of the Jewish exiles of the provinces who returned from their captivity. King Nebuchadnezzar had deported them to Babylon, but now they returned to Jerusalem and the other towns in Judah where they originally lived.² Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

This is the number of the men of Israel who returned from exile:

3 The family of Parosh	2,172
4 The family of Shephatiah	372
5 The family of Arah	775
6 The family of Pahath-moab (descendants of Jeshua and Joab)	2,812
7 The family of Elam	1,254
8 The family of Zattu	945
9 The family of Zaccai	760
10 The family of Bani	642
11 The family of Bebai	623
12 The family of Azgad	1,222
13 The family of Adonikam	666
14 The family of Bigvai	2,056
15 The family of Adin	454
16 The family of Ater (descendants of Hezekiah)	98
17 The family of Bezai	323
18 The family of Jorah	112
19 The family of Hashum	223
20 The family of Gibbar	95
21 The people of Bethlehem	123
22 The people of Netophah	56
23 The people of Anathoth	128
24 The people of Beth-azmaveth	42
25 The people of Kiriath-jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth	743
26 The people of Ramah and Geba	621
27 The people of Micmash	122
28 The people of Bethel and Ai	223
29 The citizens of Nebo	52
30 The citizens of Magbish	156
31 The citizens of West Elam	1,254
32 The citizens of Harim	320
33 The citizens of Lod, Hadid, and Ono	725
34 The citizens of Jericho	345
35 The citizens of Senaah	3,630

36 These are the priests who returned from exile: The family of Jedaiah (through the line of Jeshua) 973

37 The family of Immer 1,052

38 The family of Pashhur 1,247

39 The family of Harim 1,017

40 These are the Levites who returned from exile: The families of Jeshua and Kadmiel (descendants of Hodaviah) 74

41 The singers of the family of Asaph 128

42 The gatekeepers of the families of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai 139

43 The descendants of the following Temple servants returned from exile:
Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth,

44 Keros, Siaha, Padon,

45 Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub,

46 Hagab, Shalmal, Hanan,

47 Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah,

48 Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam,

49 Uzza, Paseah, Besai,

50 Asnah, Meunim, Nephusim,

51 Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur,

52 Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha,

53 Barkos, Sisera, Temah,

54 Nezhiah, and Hatipha.

55 The descendants of these servants of King Solomon returned from exile: Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda,

56 Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, 57 Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-hazzebaim, and Ami.

58 In all, the Temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants numbered 392.

59 Another group returned at this time from the towns of Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Kerub, Addan, and Immer. However, they could not prove that they or their families were descendants of Israel.⁶⁰ This group included the families of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—a total of 652 people.

61 Three families of priests—Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai—also returned. (This Barzillai had married a woman who was a descendant of Barzillai of Gilead, and he had taken her family name.)⁶² They searched for their names in the genealogical records, but they were not found, so they were disqualified from serving as priests.⁶³ The governor told them not to eat the priests' share of food from the sacrifices until a priest could consult the LORD about the matter by using the Urim and Thummim—the sacred lots.

64 So a total of 42,360 people returned to Judah,⁶⁵ in addition to 7,337 servants and 200 singers, both men and women.⁶⁶ They took with them 736 horses, 245 mules,⁶⁷ 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

68 When they arrived at the Temple of the LORD in

Jerusalem, some of the family leaders made voluntary offerings toward the rebuilding of God's Temple on its original site,⁶⁹ and each leader gave as much as he could. The total of their gifts came to 61,000 gold coins, 6,250 pounds of silver, and 100 robes for the priests. ⁷⁰ So the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, the Temple servants, and some of the common people settled in villages near Jerusalem. The rest of the people returned to their own towns throughout Israel.

Ezra 3

THE ALTAR IS REBUILT

1 In early autumn, when the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled in Jerusalem with a unified purpose.² Then Jeshua son of Jehozadak joined his fellow priests and Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel with his family in rebuilding the altar of the God of Israel. They wanted to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, as instructed in the Law of Moses, the man of God.³ Even though the people were afraid of the local residents, they rebuilt the altar at its old site. Then they began to sacrifice burnt offerings on the altar to the LORD each morning and evening.

4 They celebrated the Festival of Shelters as prescribed in the Law, sacrificing the number of burnt offerings specified for each day of the festival.⁵ They also offered the regular burnt offerings and the offerings required for the new moon celebrations and the annual festivals as prescribed by the LORD. The people also gave voluntary offerings to the LORD.⁶ Fifteen days before the Festival of Shelters began, the priests had begun to sacrifice burnt offerings to the LORD. This was even before they had started to lay the foundation of the LORD's Temple.

THE PEOPLE BEGIN TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE

7 Then the people hired masons and carpenters and bought cedar logs from the people of Tyre and Sidon, paying them with food, wine, and olive oil. The logs were brought down from the Lebanon mountains and floated along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to Joppa, for King Cyrus had given permission for this.

8 The construction of the Temple of God began in midspring, during the second year after they arrived in Jerusalem. The work force was made up of everyone

who had returned from exile, including Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, Jeshua son of Jehozadak and his fellow priests, and all the Levites. The Levites who were twenty years old or older were put in charge of rebuilding the LORD's Temple.⁹ The workers at the Temple of God were supervised by Jeshua with his sons and relatives, and Kadmiel and his sons, all descendants of Hodaviah. They were helped in this task by the Levites of the family of Henadad.

¹⁰ When the builders completed the foundation of the LORD's Temple, the priests put on their robes and took their places to blow their trumpets. And the Levites, descendants of Asaph, clashed their cymbals to praise the LORD, just as King David had prescribed.¹¹ With praise and thanks, they sang this song to the LORD:

"He is so good! His faithful love for Israel endures forever!"

Then all the people gave a great shout, praising the LORD because the foundation of the LORD's Temple had been laid. ¹² But many of the older priests, Levites, and other leaders who had seen the first Temple wept aloud when they saw the new Temple's foundation. The others, however, were shouting for joy.¹³ The joyful shouting and weeping mingled together in a loud noise that could be heard far in the distance.

Ezra 4

ENEMIES OPPOSE THE REBUILDING

¹ The enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were rebuilding a Temple to the LORD, the God of Israel.² So they approached Zerubbabel and the other leaders and said, "Let us build with you, for we worship your God just as you do. We have sacrificed to him ever since King Esarhaddon of Assyria brought us here." ³ But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the other leaders of Israel replied, "You may have no part in this work. We alone will build the Temple for the LORD, the God of Israel, just as King Cyrus of Persia commanded us." ⁴ Then the local residents tried to discourage and frighten the people of Judah to keep them from their work.⁵ They bribed agents to work against them and to

frustrate their plans. This went on during the entire reign of King Cyrus of Persia and lasted until King Darius of Persia took the throne.

LATER OPPOSITION UNDER XERXES AND ARTAXERXES

⁶ Years later when Xerxes began his reign, the enemies of Judah wrote a letter of accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

⁷ Even later, during the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia, the enemies of Judah, led by Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel, sent a letter to Artaxerxes in the Aramaic language, and it was translated for the king. ⁸ Rehum the governor and Shimshai the court secretary wrote the letter, telling King Artaxerxes about the situation in Jerusalem.⁹ They greeted the king for all their colleagues—the judges and local leaders, the people of Tarpel, the Persians, the Babylonians, and the people of Erech and Susa (that is, Elam).¹⁰ They also sent greetings from the rest of the people whom the great and noble Ashurbanipal had deported and relocated in Samaria and throughout the neighboring lands of the province west of the Euphrates River.¹¹ This is a copy of their letter:

"To King Artaxerxes, from your loyal subjects in the province west of the Euphrates River.

¹² "The king should know that the Jews who came here to Jerusalem from Babylon are rebuilding this rebellious and evil city. They have already laid the foundation and will soon finish its walls.¹³ And the king should know that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, it will be much to your disadvantage, for the Jews will then refuse to pay their tribute, customs, and tolls to you.

¹⁴ "Since we are your loyal subjects and do not want to see the king dishonored in this way, we have sent the king this information.¹⁵ We suggest that a search be made in your ancestors' records, where you will discover what a rebellious city this has been in the past. In fact, it was destroyed because of its long and troublesome history of revolt against the kings and

countries who controlled it.¹⁶ We declare to the king that if this city is rebuilt and its walls are completed, the province west of the Euphrates River will be lost to you."

17 Then King Artaxerxes sent this reply:

"To Rehum the governor, Shimshai the court secretary, and their colleagues living in Samaria and throughout the province west of the Euphrates River. Greetings.

18 "The letter you sent has been translated and read to me. 19 I ordered a search of the records and have found that Jerusalem has indeed been a hotbed of insurrection against many kings. In fact, rebellion and revolt are normal there! 20 Powerful kings have ruled over Jerusalem and the entire province west of the Euphrates River, receiving tribute, customs, and tolls. 21 Therefore, issue orders to have these men stop their work. That city must not be rebuilt except at my express command. 22 Be diligent, and don't neglect this matter, for we must not permit the situation to harm the king's interests."

23 When this letter from King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum, Shimshai, and their colleagues, they hurried to Jerusalem. Then, with a show of strength, they forced the Jews to stop building.

THE REBUILDING RESUMES

24 So the work on the Temple of God in Jerusalem had stopped, and it remained at a standstill until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.

Ezra 5

1 At that time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. They prophesied in the name of the God of Israel who was over them. 2 Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel and Jeshua son of Jehozadak responded by starting again to rebuild the Temple of God in Jerusalem. And the prophets of God were with them and helped them.

3 But Tattenai, governor of the province west of the Euphrates River, and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues soon arrived in Jerusalem and asked, "Who gave you permission to rebuild this Temple and restore this structure?" 4 They also asked for the names of all the men working on the Temple. 5 But because their God was watching over them, the leaders of the Jews were not prevented from building until a report was sent to Darius and he returned his decision.

TATTENAI'S LETTER TO KING DARIUS

6 This is a copy of the letter that Tattenai the governor, Shethar-bozenai, and the other officials of the province west of the Euphrates River sent to King Darius:

7 "To King Darius. Greetings.

8 "The king should know that we went to the construction site of the Temple of the great God in the province of Judah. It is being rebuilt with specially prepared stones, and timber is being laid in its walls. The work is going forward with great energy and success.

9 "We asked the leaders, 'Who gave you permission to rebuild this Temple and restore this structure?' 10 And we demanded their names so that we could tell you who the leaders were.

11 "This was their answer: 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the Temple that was built here many years ago by a great king of Israel. 12 But because our ancestors angered the God of heaven, he abandoned them to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who destroyed this Temple and exiled the people to Babylonia. 13 However, King Cyrus of Babylon, during the first year of his reign, issued a decree that the Temple of God should be rebuilt. 14 King Cyrus returned the gold and silver cups that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of Babylon. These cups were taken from that temple and presented to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom King Cyrus appointed as governor of Judah. 15 The king instructed him to return the cups to their place in Jerusalem and to rebuild the Temple of God there on its original site. 16 So this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the Temple of God in Jerusalem. The people have been working on it ever since, though it is not yet completed.' 17 "Therefore, if it pleases the king, we request that a search be made in the royal archives of Babylon to discover whether King Cyrus ever issued a decree to rebuild God's Temple in Jerusalem. And then let the king send us his decision in this matter."

Ezra 6

DARIUS APPROVES THE REBUILDING

1 So King Darius issued orders that a search be made in the Babylonian archives, which were stored in the

treasury.² But it was at the fortress at Ecbatana in the province of Media that a scroll was found. This is what it said: ³ "Memorandum:

"In the first year of King Cyrus's reign, a decree was sent out concerning the Temple of God at Jerusalem. "Let the Temple be rebuilt on the site where Jews used to offer their sacrifices, using the original foundations. Its height will be ninety feet, and its width will be ninety feet.⁴ Every three layers of specially prepared stones will be topped by a layer of timber. All expenses will be paid by the royal treasury.⁵ Furthermore, the gold and silver cups, which were taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar from the Temple of God in Jerusalem, must be returned to Jerusalem and put back where they belong. Let them be taken back to the Temple of God."

⁶ So King Darius sent this message:

"Now therefore, Tattenai, governor of the province west of the Euphrates River, and Shethar-bozenai, and your colleagues and other officials west of the Euphrates River—stay away from there!⁷ Do not disturb the construction of the Temple of God. Let it be rebuilt on its original site, and do not hinder the governor of Judah and the elders of the Jews in their work.

⁸ "Moreover, I hereby decree that you are to help these elders of the Jews as they rebuild this Temple of God. You must pay the full construction costs, without delay, from my taxes collected in the province west of the Euphrates River so that the work will not be interrupted.

⁹ "Give the priests in Jerusalem whatever is needed in the way of young bulls, rams, and male lambs for the burnt offerings presented to the God of heaven. And without fail, provide them with as much wheat, salt, wine, and olive oil as they need each day.¹⁰ Then they will be able to offer acceptable sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the welfare of the king and his sons.

¹¹ "Those who violate this decree in any way will have a beam pulled from their house. Then they will be tied to it and flogged, and their house will be reduced to a pile of rubble.¹² May the God who has chosen the city of Jerusalem as the place to honor his name destroy any king or nation that violates this command and destroys this Temple. "I, Darius, have issued this decree. Let it be obeyed with all diligence."

THE TEMPLE'S DEDICATION

¹³ Tattenai, governor of the province west of the Euphrates River, and Shethar-bozenai and their colleagues complied at once with the command of King Darius.¹⁴ So the Jewish elders continued their work, and they were greatly encouraged by the preaching of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah son of Iddo. The Temple was finally finished, as had been commanded by the God of Israel and decreed by Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, the kings of Persia.¹⁵ The Temple was completed on March 12, during the sixth year of King Darius's reign.

¹⁶ The Temple of God was then dedicated with great joy by the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of the people who had returned from exile.¹⁷ During the dedication ceremony for the Temple of God, 100 young bulls, 200 rams, and 400 male lambs were sacrificed. And 12 male goats were presented as a sin offering for the twelve tribes of Israel.¹⁸ Then the priests and Levites were divided into their various divisions to serve at the Temple of God in Jerusalem, as prescribed in the Book of Moses.

CELEBRATION OF PASSOVER

¹⁹ On April 21 the returned exiles celebrated Passover.²⁰ The priests and Levites had purified themselves and were ceremonially clean. So they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves.²¹ The Passover meal was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile and by the others in the land who had turned from their immoral customs to worship the LORD, the God of Israel.²² Then they celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days. There was great joy throughout the land because the LORD had caused the king of Assyria to be favorable to them, so that he helped them to rebuild the Temple of God, the God of Israel.

Haggai 1

A CALL TO REBUILD THE TEMPLE

¹ On August 29 of the second year of King Darius's reign, the LORD gave a message through the prophet

Haggai to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

2 "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: The people are saying, 'The time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD.'"

3 Then the LORD sent this message through the prophet Haggai:4 "Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins?5 This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Look at what's happening to you!6 You have planted much but harvest little. You eat but are not satisfied. You drink but are still thirsty. You put on clothes but cannot keep warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!

7 "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Look at what's happening to you!8 Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD.9 You hoped for rich harvests, but they were poor. And when you brought your harvest home, I blew it away. Why? Because my house lies in ruins, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, while all of you are busy building your own fine houses.10 It's because of you that the heavens withhold the dew and the earth produces no crops.11 I have called for a drought on your fields and hills—a drought to wither the grain and grapes and olive trees and all your other crops, a drought to starve you and your livestock and to ruin everything you have worked so hard to get."

OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S CALL

12 Then Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the whole remnant of God's people began to obey the message from the LORD their God. When they heard the words of the prophet Haggai, whom the LORD their God had sent, the people feared the LORD.13 Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave the people this message from the LORD: "I am with you, says the LORD!" 14 So the LORD sparked the enthusiasm of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the enthusiasm of Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the enthusiasm of the whole remnant of God's people. They began to work on the house of their God, the LORD of Heaven's Armies,15 on September 21 of the second year of King Darius's reign.

Haggai 2

THE NEW TEMPLE'S DIMINISHED SPLENDOR

1 Then on October 17 of that same year, the LORD sent another message through the prophet Haggai.2 "Say this to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of God's people there in the land:3 'Does anyone remember this house—this Temple—in its former splendor? How, in comparison, does it look to you now? It must seem like nothing at all!4 But now the LORD says: Be strong, Zerubbabel. Be strong, Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people still left in the land. And now get to work, for I am with you, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.5 My Spirit remains among you, just as I promised when you came out of Egypt. So do not be afraid.' 6 "For this is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: In just a little while I will again shake the heavens and the earth, the oceans and the dry land.7 I will shake all the nations, and the treasures of all the nations will be brought to this Temple. I will fill this place with glory, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.8 The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.9 The future glory of this Temple will be greater than its past glory, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. And in this place I will bring peace. I, the LORD of Heaven's Armies, have spoken!"

BLESSINGS PROMISED FOR OBEDIENCE

10 On December 18 of the second year of King Darius's reign, the LORD sent this message to the prophet Haggai:11 "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says. Ask the priests this question about the law:12 'If one of you is carrying some meat from a holy sacrifice in his robes and his robe happens to brush against some bread or stew, wine or olive oil, or any other kind of food, will it also become holy?'" The priests replied, "No." 13 Then Haggai asked, "If someone becomes ceremonially unclean by touching a dead person and then touches any of these foods, will the food be defiled?" And the priests answered, "Yes." 14 Then Haggai responded, "That is how it is with this people and this nation, says the LORD. Everything they do and everything they offer is defiled by their

sin.15 Look at what was happening to you before you began to lay the foundation of the LORD's Temple.16 When you hoped for a twenty-bushel crop, you harvested only ten. When you expected to draw fifty gallons from the winepress, you found only twenty.17 I sent blight and mildew and hail to destroy everything you worked so hard to produce. Even so, you refused to return to me, says the LORD. 18 "Think about this eighteenth day of December, the day when the foundation of the LORD's Temple was laid. Think carefully.19 I am giving you a promise now while the seed is still in the barn. You have not yet harvested your grain, and your grapevines, fig trees, pomegranates, and olive trees have not yet produced their crops. But from this day onward I will bless you."

PROMISES FOR ZERUBBABEL

20 On that same day, December 18, the LORD sent this second message to Haggai:21 "Tell Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, that I am about to shake the heavens and the earth.22 I will overthrow royal thrones and destroy the power of foreign kingdoms. I will overturn their chariots and riders. The horses will fall, and their riders will kill each other.

23 "But when this happens, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, I will honor you, Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, my servant. I will make you like a signet ring on my finger, says the LORD, for I have chosen you. I, the LORD of Heaven's Armies, have spoken!"

Zechariah 1

A CALL TO RETURN TO THE LORD

1 In November of the second year of King Darius's reign, the LORD gave this message to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah and grandson of Iddo:

2 "I, the LORD, was very angry with your ancestors.3 Therefore, say to the people, 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.'4 Don't be like your ancestors who would not listen or pay attention when the earlier prophets said to them, 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Turn from your evil ways, and stop all your evil practices.'

5 "Where are your ancestors now? They and the prophets are long dead.6 But everything I said through my servants the prophets happened to your ancestors, just as I said. As a result, they repented and said, 'We have received what we deserved from the LORD of Heaven's Armies. He has done what he said he would do.'"

A MAN AMONG THE MYRTLE TREES

7 Three months later, on February 15, the LORD sent another message to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah and grandson of Iddo.

8 In a vision during the night, I saw a man sitting on a red horse that was standing among some myrtle trees in a small valley. Behind him were riders on red, brown, and white horses.9 I asked the angel who was talking with me, "My lord, what do these horses mean?" "I will show you," the angel replied.

10 The rider standing among the myrtle trees then explained, "They are the ones the LORD has sent out to patrol the earth." 11 Then the other riders reported to the angel of the LORD, who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have been patrolling the earth, and the whole earth is at peace."

12 Upon hearing this, the angel of the LORD prayed this prayer: "O LORD of Heaven's Armies, for seventy years now you have been angry with Jerusalem and the towns of Judah. How long until you again show mercy to them?"13 And the LORD spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.

14 Then the angel said to me, "Shout this message for all to hear: 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: My love for Jerusalem and Mount Zion is passionate and strong.15 But I am very angry with the other nations that are now enjoying peace and security. I was only a little angry with my people, but the nations inflicted harm on them far beyond my intentions.

16 "'Therefore, this is what the LORD says: I have returned to show mercy to Jerusalem. My Temple will be rebuilt, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, and measurements will be taken for the reconstruction of Jerusalem.' 17 "Say this also: 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: The towns of Israel will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem as his own.'"

FOUR HORNS AND FOUR BLACKSMITHS

18 Then I looked up and saw four animal horns.19 "What are these?" I asked the angel who was talking with me. He replied, "These horns represent the nations that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem."

20 Then the LORD showed me four blacksmiths.21 "What are these men coming to do?" I asked. The angel replied, "These four horns—these nations—scattered and humbled Judah. Now these blacksmiths have come to terrify those nations and throw them down and destroy them."

Zechariah 8

PROMISED BLESSINGS FOR JERUSALEM

1 Then another message came to me from the LORD of Heaven's Armies:2 "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: My love for Mount Zion is passionate and strong; I am consumed with passion for Jerusalem! 3 "And now the LORD says: I am returning to Mount Zion, and I will live in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City; the mountain of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will be called the Holy Mountain. 4 "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Once again old men and women will walk Jerusalem's streets with their canes and will sit together in the city squares.5 And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls at play.

6 "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: All this may seem impossible to you now, a small remnant of God's people. But is it impossible for me? says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. 7 "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: You can be sure that I will rescue my people from the east and from the west.8 I will bring them home again to live safely in Jerusalem. They will be my people, and I will be faithful and just toward them as their God.

9 "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Be strong and finish the task! Ever since the laying of the foundation of the Temple of the LORD of Heaven's Armies, you have heard what the prophets have been saying about completing the building.10 Before the work on the Temple began, there were no jobs and no money to hire people or animals. No traveler was safe

from the enemy, for there were enemies on all sides. I had turned everyone against each other.

11 "But now I will not treat the remnant of my people as I treated them before, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.12 For I am planting seeds of peace and prosperity among you. The grapevines will be heavy with fruit. The earth will produce its crops, and the heavens will release the dew. Once more I will cause the remnant in Judah and Israel to inherit these blessings.13 Among the other nations, Judah and Israel became symbols of a cursed nation. But no longer! Now I will rescue you and make you both a symbol and a source of blessing. So don't be afraid. Be strong, and get on with rebuilding the Temple!

14 "For this is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: I was determined to punish you when your ancestors angered me, and I did not change my mind, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.15 But now I am determined to bless Jerusalem and the people of Judah. So don't be afraid.16 But this is what you must do: Tell the truth to each other. Render verdicts in your courts that are just and that lead to peace.17 Don't scheme against each other. Stop your love of telling lies that you swear are the truth. I hate all these things, says the LORD."

18 Here is another message that came to me from the LORD of Heaven's Armies.19 "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: The traditional fasts and times of mourning you have kept in early summer, midsummer, autumn, and winter are now ended. They will become festivals of joy and celebration for the people of Judah. So love truth and peace.

20 "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: People from nations and cities around the world will travel to Jerusalem.21 The people of one city will say to the people of another, 'Come with us to Jerusalem to ask the LORD to bless us. Let's worship the LORD of Heaven's Armies. I'm determined to go.'22 Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD of Heaven's Armies and to ask for his blessing.

23 "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: In those days ten men from different nations and languages of the world will clutch at the sleeve of one Jew. And they will say, 'Please let us walk with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"