

# good NEWS BIBLE

The books of

EZRA,  
NEHEMIAH  
and ESTHER



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The books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther  
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Around the world, millions of people are not able to engage with the Bible. This may be because the Scriptures aren't available to them, perhaps because they haven't been translated yet into their heart language, or because they don't yet recognise their value and significance for them. Bible Society works in around 240 countries and territories to translate, produce, distribute and connect with the Bible. We invite people to discover its life-changing message for themselves.

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# Welcome to the Good News Bible

Welcome to this dyslexia-friendly edition of the books of Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, using text from the Good News Bible.

If you are dyslexic, you may find most Bibles very difficult to read, because of their small type, long paragraphs and thin paper. This book has been specially designed with the British Dyslexia Association's style guide in mind, so it has the following features:

- Thicker paper, so that type does not show through
- Cream-coloured paper
- Matt paper
- Plain font
- Larger type
- Wider line spacing
- Short paragraphs
- Bold headings

The Good News Bible is a clear, easy-to read translation of the Bible. It uses ordinary, everyday language so that as many people as possible can read and understand it. This has made it a very popular translation, selling over 150 million copies in the UK alone.

# The book of EZRA

## **The return to Jerusalem**

**What's it about?** God brought his people home after their exile in Babylon. The priest Ezra returned to Jerusalem and called the people to return to God.

**Who wrote it?** The author is not known, but it is believed that the writer of Ezra also wrote Nehemiah.

**Why read it?** Ezra and Nehemiah saw God keeping the promises he had made to the Jews hundreds of years before.

**What's it to me?** The story of Ezra is about a new start: God wants to restore his people.

# Chapter 1

## **Cyrus Commands the Jews to Return**

<sup>1</sup>In the first year that Cyrus of Persia was emperor,<sup>a</sup> the LORD made what he had said through the prophet Jeremiah come true. He prompted Cyrus to issue the following command and send it out in writing to be read aloud everywhere in his empire:

<sup>2</sup>“This is the command of Cyrus, Emperor of Persia. The LORD, the God of Heaven, has made me ruler over the whole world and has given me the responsibility of building a temple for him in Jerusalem in Judah.

<sup>3</sup>May God be with all of you who are his people. You are to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is worshipped in Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup>If any of his people in exile need help to return, their neighbours are to give them this help. They are to provide them with silver and gold, supplies and pack animals, as well as offerings to present in the Temple of God in Jerusalem.”

<sup>5</sup>Then the heads of the clans of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and Levites, and everyone else whose heart God had moved got ready to go and rebuild the LORD's Temple in Jerusalem.

<sup>6</sup>All their neighbours helped them by giving them many things: silver utensils, gold, supplies, pack animals, other valuables, and offerings for the Temple.

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<sup>a</sup> *emperor*: King Cyrus of Persia occupied the city of Babylon in 539 BC and began to reign as the emperor of Babylonia.

<sup>7</sup>Cyrus gave them back the bowls and cups that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and had put in the temple of his gods.

<sup>8</sup>He handed them over to Mithredath, chief of the royal treasury, who made an inventory of them for Sheshbazzar, the governor of Judah, <sup>9-10</sup>as follows:

gold bowls for offerings	30
silver bowls for offerings	1,000
other bowls	29
small gold bowls	30
small silver bowls	410
other utensils	1,000

<sup>11</sup>In all there were 5,400 gold and silver bowls and other articles which Sheshbazzar took with him when he and the other exiles went from Babylon to Jerusalem.

## Chapter 2

### **The List of Those who Returned from Exile**

<sup>1</sup>Many of the exiles left the province of Babylon and returned to Jerusalem and Judah, all to their own cities. Their families had been living in exile in Babylonia ever since King Nebuchadnezzar had taken them there as prisoners.

<sup>2</sup>Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.



**“Many of the exiles left” (2.1)**

This is the list of the clans of Israel, with the number of those from each clan who returned from exile:

3-20 Parosh — 2,172

Shephatiah — 372

Arah — 775

Pahath Moab (descendants of Jeshua and Joab)  
— 2,812

Elam — 1,254

Zattu — 945

Zaccai — 760

Bani — 642

Bebai — 623

Azgad — 1,222

Adonikam — 666

Bigvai — 2,056

Adin — 454

Ater (also called Hezekiah) — 98

Bezai — 323

Jorah — 112

Hashum — 223

Gibbar — 95



# The book of NEHEMIAH

## **The rebuilding of Jerusalem**

**What's it about?** Nehemiah, one of the chief servants of the Persian king, risked everything to return to Jerusalem to restore its glory.

**Who wrote it?** We don't know, but the same author may also have written Ezra.

**Why read it?** Nehemiah is a book about trusting God when today is dangerous and tomorrow is uncertain.

**What's it to me?** This book shows that following God can lead to dangerous situations, but highlights the value of depending on God and working with other people.

# Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> This is the account of what Nehemiah son of Hacaliah accomplished.

## **Nehemiah's Concern for Jerusalem**

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year that Artaxerxes was emperor of Persia, I, Nehemiah, was in Susa, the capital city.

<sup>2</sup> Hanani, one of my brothers, arrived from Judah with another group, and I asked them about Jerusalem and about our fellow-Jews who had returned from exile in<sup>s</sup> Babylonia.

<sup>3</sup> They told me that those who had survived and were back in the homeland<sup>f</sup> were in great difficulty and that the foreigners who lived near by looked down on them. They also told me that the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down and that the gates had not been restored since the time they were burnt.

<sup>4</sup> When I heard all this, I sat down and wept.

For several days I mourned and did not eat. I prayed to God, <sup>5</sup>“LORD God of Heaven! You are great, and we stand in fear of you. You faithfully keep your covenant with those who love you and do what you command.

<sup>6</sup> Look at me, LORD, and hear my prayer, as I pray day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess

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<sup>s</sup> *had returned from exile in; or had not been exiled to.*

<sup>f</sup> *had survived and... homeland; or had remained in the homeland and had not gone into exile.*

that we, the people of Israel, have sinned. My ancestors and I have sinned.

<sup>7</sup>We have acted wickedly against you and have not done what you commanded. We have not kept the laws which you gave us through Moses, your servant.

<sup>8</sup>Remember now what you told Moses: 'If you people of Israel are unfaithful to me, I will scatter you among the other nations.

<sup>9</sup>But then if you turn back to me and do what I have commanded you, I will bring you back to the place where I have chosen to be worshipped, even though you are scattered to the ends of the earth.'

<sup>10</sup>"Lord, these are your servants, your own people. You rescued them by your great power and strength.

<sup>11</sup>Listen now to my prayer and to the prayers of all your other servants who want to honour you. Give me success today and make the emperor merciful to me."

In those days I was the emperor's wine steward.

## Chapter 2

### **Nehemiah Goes to Jerusalem**

<sup>1</sup>One day four months later, when Emperor Artaxerxes was dining, I took the wine to him. He had never seen me look sad before, <sup>2</sup>so he asked, "Why are you looking so sad? You aren't ill, so it must be that you're unhappy."



**“Why are you looking so sad?” (2.2)**

I was startled <sup>3</sup>and answered, “May Your Majesty live for ever! How can I help looking sad when the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

<sup>4</sup>The emperor asked, “What is it that you want?”

I prayed to the God of Heaven, <sup>5</sup>and then I said to the emperor, “If Your Majesty is pleased with me and is willing to grant my request, let me go to the land of Judah, to the city where my ancestors are buried, so that I can rebuild the city.”

<sup>6</sup>The emperor, with the empress sitting at his side, approved my request. He asked me how long I would be gone and when I would return, and I told him.

<sup>7</sup>Then I asked him to grant me the favour of giving me letters to the governors of West Euphrates Province, <sup>u</sup>instructing them to let me travel to Judah.

<sup>8</sup>I asked also for a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal forests, instructing him to supply me with timber for the

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<sup>u</sup> *West Euphrates Province*: Under Persian rule the land of Israel was part of this large Persian province west of the River Euphrates.

# The book of ESTHER

## **The unlikely heroine**

**What's it about?** In the court of Artaxerxes, King of Persia, Queen Esther and her relative, Mordecai, foiled a plot to destroy the Jews.

**Who wrote it?** The writer is unknown.

**Why read it?** Esther is a fabulous story, with a heroine, villains and a twist in the tale. And, like all good stories, it's about more than just the events that happen.

**What's it to me?** Esther shows us the importance of standing up for what is right, no matter the cost.

# Chapter 1

## **Queen Vashti Defies King Xerxes**

<sup>1-2</sup>From his royal throne in Persia's capital city of Susa, King Xerxes ruled over 127 provinces, all the way from India to Ethiopia<sup>¶</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>In the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his officials and administrators. The armies of Persia and Media were present, as well as the governors and noblemen of the provinces.

<sup>4</sup>For six whole months he made a show of the riches of the imperial court with all its splendour and majesty.

<sup>5</sup>After that, the king gave a banquet for all the people in the capital city of Susa, rich and poor alike. It lasted a whole week and was held in the gardens of the royal palace.

<sup>6</sup>The courtyard there was decorated with blue and white cotton curtains, tied by cords of fine purple linen to silver rings on marble columns. Couches made of gold and silver had been placed in the courtyard, which was paved with white marble, red feldspar, shining mother-of-pearl, and blue turquoise.

<sup>7</sup>Drinks were served in gold cups, no two of them alike, and the king was generous with the royal wine.

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<sup>¶</sup> *Ethiopia*: The ancient name of the extensive territory south of the First Cataract of the River Nile was Cush. This region was called Ethiopia in Graeco-Roman times, and included within its borders most of modern Sudan and some of present-day Ethiopia (Abyssinia).

<sup>8</sup>There were no limits on the drinks; the king had given orders to the palace servants that everyone could have as much as he wanted.<sup>r</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Meanwhile, inside the royal palace Queen Vashti was giving a banquet for the women.

<sup>10</sup>On the seventh day of his banquet the king was drinking and feeling merry, so he called in the seven eunuchs who were his personal servants, Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas.

<sup>11</sup>He ordered them to bring in Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown. The queen was a beautiful woman, and the king wanted to show off her beauty to the officials and all his guests.

<sup>12</sup>But when the servants told Queen Vashti of the king's command, she refused to come. This made the king furious.

<sup>13</sup>Now it was the king's custom to ask for expert opinion on questions of law and order, so he called for his advisers, who would know what should be done.

<sup>14</sup>Those he most often turned to for advice were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan — seven officials of Persia and Media who held the highest offices in the kingdom.

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<sup>r</sup> *There were no limits... wanted; or But no one was forced to drink; the king had given orders to the palace servants that everyone could have as much or as little as he wanted.*

<sup>15</sup>He said to these men, "I, King Xerxes, sent my servants to Queen Vashti with a command, and she refused to obey it! What does the law say that we should do with her?"

<sup>16</sup>Then Memucan declared to the king and his officials: "Queen Vashti has insulted not only the king but also his officials — in fact, every man in the empire!

<sup>17</sup>Every woman in the empire will begin to look down on her husband as soon as she hears what the queen has done. They'll say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to come to him, and she refused.'

<sup>18</sup>When the wives of the royal officials of Persia and Media hear about the queen's behaviour they will be telling their husbands about it before the day is out. Wives everywhere will have no respect for their husbands, and husbands will be angry with their wives.

<sup>19</sup>If it please Your Majesty, issue a royal proclamation that Vashti may never again appear before the king. Order it to be written into the laws of Persia and Media, so that it can never be changed. Then give her place as queen to some better woman.

<sup>20</sup>When your proclamation is made known all over this huge empire, every woman will treat her husband with proper respect, whether he's rich or poor."

<sup>21</sup>The king and his officials liked this idea, and the king did what Memucan suggested.