

Ezra 2:1-70 – Names of Exiles Who Returned

In about 538 BC, Cyrus the Great decreed that the Jewish exiles should return to Judah and Jerusalem and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel. Cyrus' proclamation also made provision for the temple rebuilding project. Cyrus contributed the vessels from Solomon's Temple which Nebuchadnezzar took to Babylon. The vessels were to be returned to the new temple which the returnees were to build in Jerusalem. Some people were stirred up by God to return to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Chapter two gives a list of names of the exiles who returned to the promised land in fulfillment of God's word through Jeremiah the prophet.

Read Ezra 2:1-3.

Verse 1 mentions people "who came up out of the captivity". Do you think those who left Babylonia viewed themselves as captives? Do you think those who stayed in Babylonia viewed themselves as captives?

Some people were old enough to have been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and exiled to Babylonia. Others were the descendants of the captives. Where did the people who left captivity go? What does "each to his own town mean"? (2:1)

Verse 2 mentions 11 names. What do we know about Zerubbabel? What do we know about Jeshua? Nehemiah could not be the Nehemiah of the book of Nehemiah. He came in the third wave of exiles who returned to the promised land decades later. Mordecai is not the Mordecai of the book of Esther.

Verses 3 through 61 give a list of names of the people who returned to Judah and Jerusalem. Why are these names important?

What is the significance of these people returning to Judah? Think of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Think of the exodus. What does it say about the people who remained in Babylonia? If they had the faith of Abraham, would they have stayed in Babylonia?

The trip from Babylon to Jerusalem was about a four month trip (Ezra 7:8-9). What legitimate reasons would there have been to remain in Babylonia?

Read Ezra 2:4-58 on your own.

There is an order to the list. First are family names in verses 3 through 20. Second are names of places in Judah found in verses 21 through 35. Notice that the first town mentioned is Bethlehem. Verses 36 through 39 has the family names of the priests. All but Pashhur is found in the 24 priestly divisions of 1 Chronicles 24. The priests made up about one tenth of the total number of people who returned to Judah. Why do you think such a high number of priests returned?

Verses 40 through 42 mention the Levites, the singers descended from Asaph and the gatekeepers. Note the very low number of Levites. When Ezra returned to Jerusalem, he had to make a special plea for Levites to return (Ezra 8:15-20). Why do you think there were so few Levites who returned?

The temple servants are mentioned in verses 43 through 54. Who were the temple servants? The servants of Solomon are mentioned in verses 55 through 57. Who were the servants of Solomon?

Read Ezra 2:59-63.

The previous verses mentioned 7 different groups of people. What was the problem with the group of people mentioned in verses 59 through 63?

Why was it important for these people to prove their ancestry? There were some who claimed to be priests. Why was it especially important for priests to prove their lineage? How could the priests of doubtful lineage be definitively identified as priests? (2:63)

Read Ezra 2:64-70.

What was the total number of the group who returned to Judah from Babylonia? For those who love adding numbers, you have discovered that the numbers given in verses 3 through 63 do not add up to the total number given in verse 64. What could account for this difference in the numbers? (2:64)

What did some of the heads of families do when they came to the temple site in Jerusalem? (2:68-69)