

## **Ezra 2:1-70**

Why do we find this long list of 125 names in the Bible, and why is this list of names also repeated in its entirety by Nehemiah almost a century later?

**The Bible is a book about God.** The safest rule of interpretation of any passage is to ask: What does this teach me about God?

### **Summary**

**Ezra 2:1-70 demonstrates the faithfulness of God to His covenant with His people.**

#### **1. Covenant God & His Covenant People Revisited**

In 538 BC, Cyrus the Persian king issued his decree permitting the people of God in exile to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple, in fulfillment of earlier prophecies. In the description of the journey, Ezra focuses on the things that are particularly relevant for redemptive history; the names of the covenant people of the covenant God to whom promises had been given. Their return indicated that the promise that God had given to Abraham had not been forgotten.

The number of those who returned (**Ezra 2:64**) hardly adds up to the “stars in the night sky.” Nevertheless, God is faithful, then as now.

We are not to despise “the day of small things” (**Zech. 4:10**).

The structure and various roles of the believing community highlighted in this list of names teaches us that service in the church of Christ need not be glamorous to be noticed by God even though it may be ignored by men.

Our motivation is pleasing Jesus, not the recognition of men (**2 Cor. 5:9**).

#### **2. Generous Heads of Families vv. 68-70**

The exiles returned with gifts for the rebuilding work (**Ezra 2:68–70**).

There are several things to observe here.

First, they gave “according to their ability” (**Ezra 2:69**).

Paul similarly exhorts every Christian should set something aside and present as a gift each Lord’s Day “as he may prosper” (**1 Cor. 16:2**), commending to give “according to what a person has and not according to what he does not have” (**2 Cor. 8:12**).

Secondly, there is a spirit of generosity here (**Ezra 2:69**). They gave more than the bare minimum. Instead, of asking, ““What is the least I can give and still be deemed to have complied with the law?” we should be asking, “How much more can I give than I currently do?”

Thirdly, the fact that only some of the heads of the families “made freewill offerings” (**Ezra 2:68**) suggests that this may foreshadow disappointing levels of commitment to come (**Hag. 1:4**).

These were uncertain times. Returning to Jerusalem held no guarantee of prosperity for the returnees. As they settled in the city or in nearby towns (**Ezra 2:70**), the temptation to withhold from giving in the interest of wise stewardship must have been considerable. Nevertheless, the priority was the reconstruction of the temple rather than personal gain. God's worship comes before personal need. Even among the most committed returnees, there remained a spirit of worldliness, a temptation difficult to repel and reject. Do we sometimes argue like this? We may wonder how anything more than we currently do could be expected. Until we consider that our heavenly Father gave his only Son for us (**Rom. 8:32**).

### 3. Another Exodus

We find the same features here in the return from Babylon in **538 B.C.** as in the first exodus under Moses: the people return to the land, and God's caused a foreign king to bid them leave. They initially settle in and around Jerusalem, just as their forefathers did. Their neighbors provide them with gold and silver vessels to take with them (**Ezra 1:6**). Just as in Moses' time, their numbers included animals and male and female singers (**Ezra 2:65–67; cf. Exod 12:38**). The purpose, then as well as now, was the worship of the God of Israel (**Exod 3:12**).

The rebuilding of the ruined temple was central to their future. Their identity as the people of God meant nothing unless they could worship in accordance with the way that Moses had laid down and that had been implemented in the first temple. They had to put God first in thought, principle, affection, and action. God is seeking worshipers now just as much as then (**John 4:23**); worshipers who are prepared to put the worship of God before everything else and worshipers who are willing to engage in worship in the way God has set down in his Word. The returnees were determined that the world be shown the door and that true biblical worship be restored. To what extent they kept it is another matter. In the end they would not and could not. Of all these 42360 people, leaders, priests, levite helpers and temple, none of them could ultimately worship God personally, perfectly and perpetually. Under God's hand, they would reestablish the types and shadows of Old Testament worship but they must patiently wait in faith for the anti-type, Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, we should allow these returning exiles to challenge us in our convictions about the centrality of the worship of God in our lives. How important is it to us that we worship God as he has designed? What sacrifices would we be prepared to make to ensure its implementation and consistent practice?