

EZRA 2

A CATALOG OF RETURNING EXILES

In this chapter, we are shown that an account was kept in writing of the families who returned from captivity in Babylon. This was done for their honor, as part of their recompense for their faith and courage, their confidence in God, and their affection to their own land. Those who honor the Lord, He will thus honor; and the names of all who accept the offer of salvation by Christ shall be found, to their honor, in a record that is even more sacred record than this – namely, in the Lamb’s Book of Life!

The leaders of the people were the first ones mentioned, in verse 2. Zerubbabel and Jeshua were like their Moses and Aaron; Zerubbabel was their chief prince, and Jeshua their chief priest. Two men named Nehemiah and Mordecai were mentioned here; and it is possible that at least Mordecai was the same as the famous character by that name who played a prominent role in the Book of Esther. If he is indeed the same man, it seems that he later returned to the Persian court for the service of his country.

There are some small differences between the numbers of some of the families registered here, as those who *planned* to make the return journey from Babylon; and those in Nehemiah chapter 7, where this catalog is repeated as a record of those who actually made it back home to Jerusalem. This could easily happen by the simple fact that not all who put down their names in the register here in Ezra 2 actually returned when it was time to go; and in other cases, some who were not planning to return in the first place may have decided to go ahead and make the journey to Jerusalem at the last minute.

One or two interesting tidbits from this register include the “children of Bethlehem” (verse 21), who only numbered 123 men, even though that place was David’s hometown; for Bethlehem was “little among the thousands of Judah,” and yet it was to be there that the Messiah would later be born (Mic. 5:2). Anathoth had been a famous place in the tribe of Benjamin, and yet here it numbered only 128 (verse 23); this may be imputed to the Divine curse which the inhabitants of Anathoth brought upon themselves by persecuting the prophet Jeremiah, who was from their city (Isa. 10:3; Jer. 11:21, 23). Alas! Nothing brings ruin upon a people sooner than persecution of the Lord’s children.

Verses 36-63 give an account of the priests, Levites, and Temple servants who returned to Jerusalem. The priests made up a considerable number – about 10% of the whole group of returning exiles! But we cannot help wondering at the small number of the Levites, for the singers and the porters combined did

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A catalog of the various families of returning exiles – verses 1-35
- ❖ A catalog of the returning priests, Levites, and Temple servants – verses 36-63
- ❖ The sum total of the returning exiles – verses 64-67
- ❖ Offerings are given for the service of the Temple – verses 68-70

not even total 350. The returning exiles included some of the Temple-servants, who were called Nethinim. These were the descendants of the Gibeonites who had tricked Joshua and the Israelites into making a peace-treaty with them, nearly a thousand years earlier (Josh. 9:27). Consequently, they were made to be servants in Jehovah's house, as hewers of wood and drawers of water; as were "the children of Solomon's servants," whom he dedicated for the same purpose. It is an honor to belong to God's house, even though it may be in the lowest office there.

This chapter mentions some persons who were looked upon as Israelites by birth, and others as priests; and yet they could not make out a clear title to those honors. A considerable number (verses 59-60) presumed that they were descendants of Jacob, but they could not produce their ancestries; and yet they still went to Jerusalem, because they had an affection for the house and people of God. Others could not prove themselves to be priests; for during the captivity, when there was no advantage to be gotten by the priesthood, they preferred to be known as the descendants of Barzillai, a great man in David's time (2 Kings 17:27-29). But when they returned to Jerusalem, when the priests recovered their rights, these people wanted to be regarded as priests again; but they could no longer prove their family connections with Aaron. So they were forbidden to partake in the priests' privileges, until there was a high priest with the Urim and Thummin, which were used to determine the Lord's will in uncertain matters.

The sum total of the Jews who returned out of Babylon was 42,360. The individual sums given for the families in this chapter amount to 29,818; and so the remaining 12,542 are probably a remnant from the rest of the tribes of Israel, other than Judah and Benjamin. 42,000 was more than double the number of people who were carried away as captives into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar; and so, just as in Egypt, the time of their affliction was the time of their increase. When God says, "Increase and multiply," a little one shall become a thousand!

When these people came to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, that once-beautiful house lay in ruins – a heap of rubbish. But they offered freely toward the rebuilding of it. Their offering was nothing in comparison with the large offerings of the princes in David's time; but since it was offered according to their ability, it was still acceptable to God – just like the poor widow's two mites. It seems that in Babylon, God had blessed His people with some increase of wealth, as well as of numbers; and so, in proportion as He had prospered them, they contributed cheerfully to the expenses of rebuilding His house.

Lord, we praise You for the Deliverance of Your people from the captivity of sin, which was foreshadowed by leaders like Zerubbabel! Amen.

