

Restoration of Exiles: A Study of Ezra Chapter 2

Review: In 539 Cyrus the Persian conquered Babylon and decreed that any of the Jews who had been in captivity there for the last 70 years or so and were so moved could return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple of the Lord. Apparently the first group departed around the year 536 for the 900 mile walk back to their home. Others waves would follow later.

Ezra 2 consists largely of a list of exiles, compiled from several sources, who returned to their homeland. The main point of all these names and numbers appears to be *that this is the legitimate community of God*, people who went into exile, suffered God's judgment, and were now being restored as his people.

I won't ask you to read all the names in this chapter, but scan down the page and see ...

... **how many total people returned?** (you can go get your calculator if you want, or you can just skip down to vv. 64-67).

... **how many times you can find the name "Ezra". What do you conclude from this?** (cf. Ezra 7:1-8).

Last week we noted that Sheshbazzar was the leader of the original group (1:8, 11), but he is not mentioned in chapter 2. Although he got the work started, he apparently died, was replaced, or moved to the background fairly early. In chapter 5 he is referred to as a distant memory. All this suggests that Ezra (whom we believe wrote the book) compressed and compiled multiple lists of returnees into one list here in chapter 2 to make the point that a large group of God's people returned to do his will.

Instead of Sheshbazzar, other leaders are mentioned in Ezra 2:2. Two of these are mentioned together often. Try to remember these two, because we will see them a few more times in Ezra.

Zerubbabel. He was the _____ of the new community in Judah (Haggai 1:1, 14; 2:2)

Joshua. (Not to be confused with Joshua Son of Nun in Joshua 1:1-2.) The Joshua in Ezra was a _____ (Ezra 3:2), in fact he was the _____ (Haggai 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2; Zechariah 3:1).

Notice that we just read verses from Haggai and Zechariah. These two prophets did their work during the time of the book of Ezra and are related to the book of Ezra. We'll take a brief look at those two books later.

The Nehemiah mentioned in Ezra 2:2 does not appear to be the one mentioned in the book of Nehemiah. The work of the Nehemiah described in the book of Nehemiah came later. Also the Nehemiah of the book of Nehemiah refers to this same list in Nehemiah 7:6-7 in a way that does not sound like he is talking about himself.

Though some leaders are mentioned here and are important, the emphasis falls more on the large group of the people of God who returned to rebuild the Temple. **What do you make of this?**

In v. 36-39, we learn that there were 4289 priests, which is about 10% of the total in the whole list (see v. 64). A relatively large percentage of priests would be appropriate, since the primary purpose was to rebuild and restore the temple. In contrast, there were not many Levites (v. 40). Cf. Ezra 8:15-20 where Ezra himself later makes a special effort to increase the number of Levites. If you need to brush up, the Levites are merely descendants of Levi and part of his tribe. All priests had to be taken from this tribe, but not everyone in the tribe was a priest. Priests had other qualifications and had special duties in the Temple. The High Priest (Joshua, see above) was the leader of the priests and the only one who could enter the Most Holy Place (once it was built again).

"House of the Lord" (v. 68) refers to the site where the Temple stood before the Babylonians destroyed it and where it would be rebuilt soon.

Does the amount given to rebuild the Temple in v. 69 sound like a little or a lot? What do you learn from this?

What would you say is the point of this chapter overall?

Some 50,000 people took a 900 mile journey to an unprotected area where they will face opposition and hardship to rebuild the Temple of God. How would you apply this to your own life?