

Ezra

Chapter 2

The Exiles Return

Now these were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town. 2 They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel: 3 the sons of Parosh, 2,172. 4 The sons of Shephatiah, 372. 5 The sons of Arah, 775. 6 The sons of Pahath-moab, namely the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,812. 7 The sons of Elam, 1,254. 8 The sons of Zattu, 945. 9 The sons of Zaccai, 760. 10 The sons of Bani, 642. 11 The sons of Bebai, 623. 12 The sons of Azgad, 1,222. 13 The sons of Adonikam, 666. 14 The sons of Bigvai, 2,056. 15 The sons of Adin, 454. 16 The sons of Ater, namely of Hezekiah, 98. 17 The sons of Bezai, 323. 18 The sons of Jorah, 112. 19 The sons of Hashum, 223. 20 The sons of Gibbar, 95. 21 The sons of Bethlehem, 123. 22 The men of Netophah, 56. 23 The men of Anathoth, 128. 24 The sons of Azmaveth, 42. 25 The sons of Kiriath-arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, 743. 26 The sons of Ramah and Geba, 621. 27 The men of Michmas, 122. 28 The men of Bethel and Ai, 223. 29 The sons of Nebo, 52. 30 The sons of Magbish, 156. 31 The sons of the other Elam, 1,254. 32 The sons of Harim, 320. 33 The sons of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, 725. 34 The sons of Jericho, 345. 35 The sons of Senaah, 3,630. 36 The priests: the sons of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, 973. 37 The sons of Immer, 1,052. 38 The sons of Pashhur, 1,247. 39 The sons of Harim, 1,017. 40 The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, 74. 41 The singers: the sons of Asaph, 128. 42 The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, and the sons of Shobai, in all 139. 43 The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth, 44 the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon, 45 the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub, 46 the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shamlai, the sons of Hanan, 47 the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah, 48 the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam, 49 the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai, 50 the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephisim, 51 the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur, 52 the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha, 53 the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Temah, 54 the sons of Neziah, and the sons of Hatipha. 55 The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Hassophereth, the sons of Peruda, 56 the sons of Jaalah, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel, 57 the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth-hazzebaim, and the sons of Ami. 58 All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392. 59 The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer, though they could not prove their fathers' houses or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel: 60 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, 652. 61 Also, of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, and the sons of Barzillai (who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name). 62 These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but they were not found there, and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. 63 The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.

64 The whole assembly together was 42,360, 65 besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337, and they had 200 male and female singers. 66 Their horses were 736, their mules were 245, 67 their camels were 435, and their donkeys were 6,720. 68 Some of the heads of families, when they came to the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem, made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site. 69 According to their ability they gave to the treasury of the work 61,000 darics of gold, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priests' garments. 70 Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel in their towns.

2:1–70 The list of returning exiles in ch. 2 almost exactly parallels the list in Ne 7:6–73 (see also 1 Esdras 5:4–46 in the Apocrypha). The list of localities indicates that people retained the memories of their homes and that exiles from a wide background of tribes, villages and towns returned. In comparing the list here with that in Ne 7, one notes many differences in the names and numbers listed. About 20 percent of the numbers, e.g., are not the same in Ezra and Nehemiah. Many of these differences may be explained, however, by assuming that a cipher notation was used with vertical strokes for units and horizontal strokes for tens, which led to copying errors. (CSB)

2:1 *province*. Probably Judah (cf. 5:8, where the Aramaic word for “province” is translated “district”; see also Ne 1:3).(CSB)

Judah (1:2). Other known Persian provinces west of the Euphrates include Samaria, Moab, and Ammon. (TLSB)

own town. Not only Jerusalem but other towns in the area were also resettled (cf vv 21–35). (TLSB)

2:2–67 This list is a testimony to God’s goodness in preserving the identity of His chosen people during their captivity in a foreign country. An important document, it represented a kind of charter of the newly founded province of Judah. New names and numbers may have been added from time to time to keep the record current. Nine groups are distinguished: the leaders (v 2a; Ne 7:7 adds a 12th name); “men of the people of Israel,” some listed by family names, others by towns (vv 2b–35); priests (vv 36–39); all Levites (vv 40–42); Levitical singers (v 41); Levitical gatekeepers (v 42); temple servants (vv 43–54); sons of Solomon’s servants (vv 55–58); and some people without certified family ties (vv 59–63). (TLSB)

2:2 *Zerubbabel*. Later governor of Judah and active in rebuilding the temple (3:8; Hg 1:1). (TLSB)

With Zerubbabel and Jeshua as their leaders they remained under the leadership of David’s royal line and the high priests descended from Aaron. (PBC)

Jeshua. Means “The LORD saves” and is an Aramaic variant of Hebrew “Joshua.” The Greek form is “Jesus.” Jeshua is the same as the Joshua of Hag 1:1, the son of the high priest Jehozadak (Jozadak, Ezr 3:2), who was taken into exile (1Ch 6:15). (CSB)

Nehemiah. Not the Nehemiah of the book by that name. (CSB)

Bore the same name as the governor who arrived in Jerusalem some 90 years later (Ne 1:1). (TLSB)

Mordecai. A Babylonian name based on that of Marduk the god of Babylon (cf. Jer 50:2). Esther's cousin had the same name (Est 2:7). (CSB)

2:3 *Parosh*. Means “flea” (Israelites were often named after insects and animals). Members of this family, as well as of several other families named in vv. 6–14, also returned with Ezra (8:3–14). (CSB)

2:5 *Arah*. Probably means “wild ox.” Since the name is rare in the OT and has been found in documents from Mesopotamia, it may have been adopted during the exile. (CSB)

2:6 *Pahath-Moab*. Means “governor of Moab” and may have once designated an official title. (CSB)

2:12 *Azgad*. Cf. 8:12; means “Gad is strong.” It is a reference either to Gad (the god of fortune, referred to in Isa 65:11) or to the Transjordanian tribe of Gad. (CSB)

2:16 *Ater*. Means “left-handed,” as in Jdg 3:15; 20:16. (CSB)

2:21–35 Whereas the names in vv. 3–20 are of families, vv. 21–35 present a series of villages and towns, many of which were in Benjamite territory north of Jerusalem. It is significant that there are no references to towns in the Negev, south of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar overran Judah in 597 B.C. (Jer 13:19), the Edomites (see the book of Obadiah) took advantage of the situation and occupied that area. (CSB)

2:21–35 Towns clustered about Jerusalem within a radius of c 30 mi. If the list is complete, the Persian province was considerably smaller than the territory of preexilic Judah. See map, p 615. The community was hemmed in on all sides by various racial groups (3:3; 4:1, 4; Ne 4:7). (TLSB)

2:21 *sons of Bethlehem*. The ancestors of Jesus may have been among the returnees. (CSB)

C 5 mi S of Jerusalem. (TLSB)

2:28 *Bethel*. Towns such as Bethel, Mizpah, Gibeon and Gibeah seem to have escaped the Babylonian assault. Bethel, however, was destroyed in the transition between the Babylonian and Persian periods. Archaeological excavations reveal that there was a small town on the site in Ezra's day. (CSB)

2:33 *Lod*. Modern Lydda. (CSB)

2:35 *Senaah*. The largest number of returnees—3,630 (3,930 in Ne 7:38)—is associated with Senaah. It has therefore been suggested that they did not come from a specific locality or family, but represented low-caste people, as inferred from the meaning of the name. (CSB)

2:36–39 Four clans of priests numbering 4,289, about a tenth of the total. (CSB)

2:40 *Levites*. See Introduction to Leviticus: Title. 74. The number of Levites who returned was relatively small (cf. 8:15). Since the Levites had been entrusted with the menial tasks of temple service, many of them may have found a more comfortable way of life in exile. (CSB)

Total number of Levites was 341, while that of the priests was 4,289. Normally, these two groups of temple officiants would be in reverse proportion (cf 2Ch 29:34). The prospect of serving as assistants to the priests may have kept the Levites from leaving Babylonia. Later, Ezra found “none of the sons of Levi” in the group that volunteered to return to Jerusalem with him (8:15). (TLSB)

2:41 *Asaph*. One of the three Levites appointed by David over the temple singers (1Ch 25:1; 2Ch 5:12; 35:15), whose duties are detailed in 1Ch 15:16–24. (CSB)

2:42 *gatekeepers*. Usually Levites (1Ch 9:26; 2Ch 23:4; 35:15; Ne 12:25; 13:22). They are mentioned 16 times in Ezra-Nehemiah and 19 times in Chronicles. (CSB)

Their primary function was to tend the doors and gates of the temple (1Ch 9:17–27) and to perform other menial tasks (1Ch 9:28–32; 2Ch 31:14). (CSB)

2:43–57 The temple servants and the descendants of Solomon’s servants together numbered 392 (v. 58), which was more than the total of the Levites, singers and gatekeepers together (vv. 40–42). (CSB)

2:46 *Hanan*. Means “(God) is gracious.” The verb “to be gracious” and its derivatives are the components of numerous personal names in the OT—e.g., Johanan (“The LORD is gracious”; see 8:12), which has given us the English name John. (CSB)

2:51 *Bakbuk*. Means “jar.” It may have originally been a nickname for a fat man with a protruding belly. Cf. Jer 19:1, 10, where the same Hebrew word is translated “jar.” (CSB)

2:53 *Barkos*. Means “son of Kos” (or Qos, an Edomite god). (CSB)

2:55, 58 *descendants of the servants of Solomon*. The phrase occurs only here and in Ne 7:57, 60; 11:3. These may be the descendants of the Canaanites whom Solomon enslaved (1Ki 9:20–21). (CSB)

They had been forced to perform the menial tasks needed for the temple service (Joshua 9:23; 2 Chronicles 2:17,18). If so, their preservation as part of God’s people and their willingness to return are a special demonstration of God’s grace. (PBC)

2:55 *Hassophereth*. Probably means “the scribal office/function” and may have once been an official title. (CSB)

2:58 *temple servants*. Descendants of the Gibeonites and other groups. (TLSB)

Solomon’s servants. Descendants of Canaanite tribes, who became Solomon’s house slaves. Cf 1Ki 9:20–21. (TLSB)

2:59–63 Individuals who lacked evidence of their ancestry. (CSB)

2:59 *Tel Melah*. Means “mound of salt,” possibly a mound on which salt had been scattered (see Jdg 9:45 and note). The Hebrew word *tel* designates a hill-like mound formed by the remains of a ruined city. The Jewish exiles had been settled along the Kebar River (Eze 1:1), perhaps near Nippur, a city in southern Mesopotamia that was the stronghold of rebels. The Jews had probably been settled on the mounds of ruined cities that had been depopulated by the Babylonians. (CSB)

Probably places in Babylonia. (TLSB)

prove their fathers' houses. From genealogy records (v 62), demonstrating the importance of lists such as those found in 1Ch 1–9. (TLSB)

2:61 *Barzillai.* Means “man of iron.” For another Barzillai see 2Sa 17:27–29; 19:31–39; 1Ki 2:7. (CSB)

2:62 *so they were excluded from the priesthood* – If people of doubtful ancestry had been allowed to serve, the validity of the sacrifices offered by these priests would have been in doubt. The people’s confidence in their worship and in the forgiveness of their sins could have been undermined. (PBC)

Only those with proven ancestral credentials could serve as priests. (TLSB)

2:63 *governor.* Probably either Sheshbazzar or Zerubbabel. (CSB)

Hbr *tirshatha*; probably a Persian word designating the men appointed by Persian kings to administer affairs in the restored community of Judah (Ne 7:65, 70; 10:1). The governor is not named. (TLSB)

2:64 *42,360.* Considerably more than the sum of the other figures given. (CSB)

The total given is far larger than the sum of the individual contingents recorded in the previous verses (29,818). Ne 7:66 gives the same total, but the individual entries there add up to only 31,089. The names of some families or groups were evidently omitted from these lists (TLSB)

<i>Categories</i>	<i>Ezra</i>	<i>Nehemiah</i>	<i>1 Esdras</i>
M Men of Israel	24,144	25,406	25,947
Priests	4,289	4,289	5,288
Le Levites, singers, gatekeepers	341	360	341
TT Temple servants, descendants of Solomon’s servants	392	392	372
MeMen of unproven origin	652	642	652
TotTotals	<hr/> 29,818	<hr/> 31,089	<hr/> 32,600

It is difficult to account for the difference of about 10,000–12,000. The figure may refer to an unspecified 10,000–12,000 women and/or children, and it doubtless includes the priests of unproven origin referred to in vv. 61–63. Some suggest that the groups explicitly counted were returnees from Judah and Benjamin, while the remainder were from other tribes. (CSB)

2:65 *male and female servants.* The ratio of servants to others (one to six) is relatively high. The fact that so many returned with their masters speaks highly of the benevolent treatment of servants by the Jews. (CSB)

singers. The men and women singers listed here may be secular singers who sang at social events such as weddings and funerals (2Ch 35:25), as distinct from the temple singers of v. 41, who were all male. (CSB)

Likely singers for secular entertainment, not “the sons of Asaph” (v 41). Females did not participate in temple worship, though they sang praises to God after the exodus (Ex 15:20–21) and had some role of service at the entrance to the tabernacle (Ex 38:8). (TLSB)

2:66 *horses*. Perhaps a donation from Cyrus for the nobility. (CSB)

mules. Often used by royalty and the wealthy (1Ki 1:33; Isa 66:20). (CSB)

The comparatively small number of animals suggests that the Israelites were no longer a predominantly agricultural people during the captivity. It may also indicate the relatively low economic status of those who were willing to return. (PBC)

2:67 *donkeys*. Were used to carry loads, women or children. Sheep, goats and cattle are not mentioned. They would have slowed the caravan. (CSB)

2:68 *came ... Jerusalem*. For the route of the return from exile. (CSB)

made freewill offerings – In grateful response they gave freewill offerings according to their ability. Rather than feeling that they were doing God a favor by leaving their Babylonian homes, the people recognized what a privilege it was to participate in the building of God’s temple. Grateful hearts produced generous offerings. Our offerings as NT believers are to be based on the same principle (1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8:8-15). The words of St Paul apply to believers of all times: “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7) (PBC)

Voluntary; not prescribed by law (Lv 22:17–25; Nu 15:1–10; Dt 12:17). (TLSB)

2:69 The parallel passage (Ne 7:70–72) gives a fuller description than the account in Ezra. In Ezra the gifts come from the heads of the families (v. 68), while in Nehemiah the gifts are credited to three sources: the governor, the heads of the families, and the rest of the people. (CSB)

darics ... minas. Earliest biblical reference to minted coins (which were valued by weight). The Persians allowed the Judeans to mint their own coins which had Aramaic markings for the province “Judah.” *priests’ garments*. Cf Ex 29:21; Ezr 3:10. (TLSB)

minas. In the sexagesimal system (based on the number 60) that originated in Mesopotamia, there were 60 shekels in a mina and 60 minas in a talent. A shekel, which was about two-fifths of an ounce of silver, was the average wage for a month’s work. Thus a mina would be the equivalent of five years’ wages, and a talent would be 300 years’ wages. (CSB)

2:70 Later, Nehemiah (11:1–2) would be compelled to move people by lot to reinforce the population of Jerusalem. (CSB)

their towns. The clergy and some of the people no doubt settled in Jerusalem and nearby towns, while the rest went to other towns named in vv 20–35. (TLSB)

Ch 2 Although 42,360 people respond to Cyrus’s invitation to return to Judah, relatively few Levites—key temple workers—appear on the list. As then, the Lord gives each of us a role of service in our congregation. The services of God’s house require our faithful support in word and deed. When you are discouraged or overwhelmed by the needs of your congregation, entrust your cares to the Lord of heaven, who oversees all things for your benefit. He will bless you through the service of Word and Sacrament offered in His name. • Dearest Father, grant me joy and contentment in my calling. Help me to see the greater purpose and need of my congregation. Amen. (TLSB)