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The Clans Who Returned from Captivity in Babylon Ezra 2: 1-19

The clans who returned from captivity in Babylon DIG: Why was this list compiled? What religious, legal and social implications did it have? What is the connection between this chapter and the previous one? What transfer of leadership occurs?

REFLECT: What family records do you keep: (a) a diary? (b) old letters? (c) photo albums? (d) memorabilia? Why do you keep them? What would an inventory of them indicate about the kind of person you are or the kind of family you come from?

During the ministry of Zerubbabel (**to see link click Ag – The First Return**). **Compiled by the Chronicler from the Ezra memoirs**
(see **Ac – Ezra-Nehemiah from a Jewish Perspective: The Ezra Memoirs**).

It was the year **538 BC** and **Cyrus** the Persian had just issued **his** decree permitting **the righteous of the TaNaKh** to return to **Jerusalem** and rebuild **the Temple** (see **Ai – The Decree of Cyrus**). The decree was a fulfillment of earlier prophecies of Scripture (see **Ak – Numbering the Exiles Who Returned Under Zerubbabel**). The passages from **Jeremiah** were especially encouraging to **Dani'el** in the final months of the **Babylonian** captivity **(Dani'el 9:1-2)**. **The head of the clan had probably died long before. Not all the members of these families returned at the time of Cyrus' edict during the First Return. Some remained behind and only came back in the Second Return under Ezra.** Others succeeded in adapting to their lives in **Babylon** and decided to remain there. Some, like Mordecai in the time of **Esther**– some sixty years into the future, some twenty years before **Ezra** appears in **Chapter 7** – held respectable positions in Persia. Life in Babylon, from one perspective, was not so bad. But the focus now turns to those who returned. For **some**, the exile tested **their** faith in the promises of **God**. As various family **clans** gathered to discuss the decree to return to **Jerusalem**, among **them** were those whose **hearts God had stirred (Ezra 1:5)**.

Ezra 2 is written in retrospect, that is, when the return journey was finished. We, of course, would like to know about that journey. How long did it take? How many stops along the way? Was there enough food for all those people? Did they all leave at the same time, or, as is more likely, did they travel in successive groups? How old were they? How many children and pregnant mothers? There are so many questions for which **Ezra** provides no answers. Just as the gospel writers spend about half their account of **Yeshua's** life recording **His** final week, so **Ezra** gives his focus to the things that are particularly relevant for us. And what are these things? Names!

Judah remained a part of Persia and had no independent authority of **her** own. For the returning **exiles**, therefore, a greater motivation impelled them to return than the assertion of their national identity. There were **the people of God** to whom promises had been given, promises that appeared impossible of fulfillment in **Babylon**. The exile signaled both judgment and hope at the same time. **Their** return, and the orderly way in which it took place, signaled in some way that the promise that **YVHV** had given to **Abraham** – that **His descendants** would be **as numerous as the stars in the night sky and the sand upon the seashore (Genesis 22:7)** – hand not been forgotten.[31]



Now these are the people of the province of **Judah**, a small district within the great administration are known as **beyond the River, or Syria and Palestine (4:10). Judah** was perhaps carved out of adjacent districts and newly granted an identity of its own – for **Sheshbazzar** was arriving there as its **ruler (5:14)**. **They went up from the captives of the exile, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive to Babylon. They returned gradually to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his town (Ezra 2:1). The people in the First Return settled in the neighborhood of Jerusalem.**

Twelve leaders are mentioned, eleven here and **Sheshbazzar** at the close of **Chapter 1**. The number can hardly be insignificant. The number **twelve** (tribes,

apostles) is deeply significant. Those leaders were representative of **Isra'el – the people of God**. Already, **ADONAI** seems to be anticipating a time when the nation will fall into the historical past and the righteous of the TaNaKh will gather as one, called into fellowship with one another and **their Messiah** (see the commentary on **Acts Al – The Ruach Ha'Kodesh Comes at Shavu'ot**).[32]

They came with Zerubbabel, a natural leader of such a company **(Ezra 2:2a): The name in Akkadian means "seed of (born in) Babylon" and was not uncommon at that time. He was a grandson of king Jehoiachin** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Du – Jehoiachin Ruled For 3 Months in 598 BC**) **and therefore a direct descendant of King David** (see the commentary on **Revelation Fi – The Government of the Messianic Kingdom**)**. Though generally described as the son of Shealtiel (Ezra 3:2), he is also described as the son of Pedaiah (First Chronicles 3:19). He may have been the latter's nephew and heir, or his legal son as the result of a levirate marriage. Zerubbabel was the ruler under Darius (Haggai 1:14).**

Jeshua (Ezra 2:2b): A shorter form in Hebrew of Joshua. He was the first son of the High Priest Jehozadak (Haggai 1:1, 2:2 and 4). His father, Seraiah, was put to death at Riblah by Nebuchadnezzar (Second Kings 25:18ff and First Chronicles 5:40).

Nehemiah (Ezra 2:2c): He is not the Nehemiah of the book by that name.

Seraiah (Ezra 2:2d) means "**YHVH** is Prince." **This was the name of Ezra's father who may be intended here. Nehemiah 7:7** has **Azariah**.

Reelaiah (Ezra 2:2e) is paralleled in **Nehemiah 7:7** as **Raamiah**.

Mordechai (Ezra 2:2f): based on the name of god of **Babylon, Marduk (Jeremiah 50:2).** This could not have been Queen **Esther's** uncle, for **she** would not become queen for another half century and her uncle wasn't even born yet.

Bilshan (Ezra 2:2g) is probably the Akkadian **Bel-sunu**, meaning "Their **Lord**,"

Mispar (Ezra 2:2h) is paralleled in **Nehemiah 7:7,** a feminine form of **Mispereth,**

Bigvai (Ezra 2:2i) see **Ezra 2:14** below,

Rehum (Ezra 2:2j) is a shortened form for "**God** has been compassionate."

Nehemiah 7:7 has **Nehum**, which is probably a scribal error,

and Baanah (Ezra 2:2j).

The number of men of the people of Isra'el (Ezra 2:2): Presumably the laity as distinct from the priests and Levites,

the sons of Parosh – 2,172 (Ezra 2:3): The descendants of Parosh represented the largest family of priests returning to Babylon. As a common noun the meaning is "a flea." A branch of this clan accompanied Ezra in the Second Return (Ezra 8:3). One member is mentioned among those who assisted in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3:25) and some of them were guilty of intermarriage (Ezra 10:25),

the sons of Shephatiah – 372 (Ezra 2:4), Shephatiah means "**YHVH** has judged." Other members of the family returned with **Ezra (Ezra 8:8),**

the sons of Arah – 775 (Ezra 2:5), Arah means "wild ox." As the name appears elsewhere only in **First Chronicles 7:39** and has been found in documents from Mesopotamia, it may have been adopted during the Exile,

the sons of Pahath-moab: Literally, "governor of Moab." It is assumed that the founder of this clan had been ruler over part of that country. From Ezra 8:4 we learn that some members of the clan returned with in the Second Return with Ezra. And the sons of Jeshua and Joab – 2,812 (Ezra 2:6): The conjunction is not in the text here, but it does occur in the list in Nehemiah 7:11. Jeshua and Joab were subdivisions of the clan. There may be the descendants of the tribe of Reuben who were deported from the province of Moab by Tiglath-pileser III **(First Chronicles 5:3-8)**,

the sons of Elam – 1,254 (Ezra 2:7): as a personal name it occurs in First Chronicles 8:24 and some think that same man is meant here. Elam was the name of the country in southwest Iran in the area of Susa **(Ezra 8:7, 10:2** and **26; Nehemiah 7:12, 10:14).**

the sons of Zattu – 945 (Ezra 2:8),

the sons of Zaccai – 760 (Ezra 2:9): The name recalls that of the father of the famous Rabban Jochanan. Zaccai may mean "pure" or may be a shortened form of **Zechariah** (**YHVH** has remembered),

the sons of Bani – 642 (Ezra 2:10): Bani is a shortened form of **Benaiah** (**YHVH** has built). **In Nehemiah 7:15 the name is Binnui,**

the sons of Bebai – 623 (Ezra 2:11), Bebai means, “pupil of the eye,”

the sons of Azgad – 1,222 (Ezra 2:12), Azgad means “**Gad** is strong,” and is either a reference to **Gad**, the god of fortune, or to the Transjordan tribe of **Gad**. This name occurs only here and in **Nehemiah 7:17**,

the sons of Adonikam – 666 (Ezra 2:13): Adonikam means “my **Lord** has arisen.” **Of this clan a section remained behind and returned later with Ezra (Ezra 8:13),**

the sons of Bigvai – 2,056 (Ezra 2:14), Bigvai is a Persian name meaning “happy,” was borne by the Persian governor of Judea addressed by the Jews of Elephantine in 407 BC,

the sons of Adin – 454 (Ezra 2:15), Adin means “voluptuous,”

the sons of Ater, Ater means “Lefty,” **(Judges 3:15, 20:16), of Hezekiah – 98 (Ezra 2:16), Hezekiah** means “**YHVH** is my strength.” **Belonging to the clan of the family whose head bore that name,**

the sons of Bezai – 323 (Ezra 2:17), Bezai is a shortened form of Bezaleel, meaning “in the shadow of **God**,”

the sons of Jorah – 112 (Ezra 2:18): Jorah means “autumn rain.” **Instead of Jorah, Nehemiah 7:24 has Hariph,**

the sons of Hashum – 223 (Ezra 2:19). Hashum means “broad nose.”

There are those today who might wonder why more was not made of the messianic overtones of **Zerubbabel’s** presence. As the lineal descendant of the royal house and heir to the throne of David **(First Chronicles 3:19)**, questions concerning **his** role in the new community would surely have arisen. This was clearly the case in the prophecies of **Haggai** and **Zechariah 1-8**. Was he the **shoot** from **the stump of Jesse** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Dc – A Shoot Will Come Up from the Stump of Jesse**), the promised **Messiah** so fervently looked for by **Isaiah**? The text is silent on this point and hints at the growing notion by **the righteous of the TaNaKh** after the exile that **Isra’el** was no longer to look for individuals for its

salvation. Hezekiah and Josiah had not succeeded in permanently stemming the tide of stubbornness, and neither would **Zerubbabel** nor the Maccabees. More and more, **Israelites** became aware that **their** hope was to be founded on a relationship with **ADONAI** alone.

Seen in this way, the list serves the practical purpose of assuring **the restored community** that **they** had not arrived back in the Promise Land for no reason, but were in fact solidly established upon **their** ancestral roots as emphasized by **their** family genealogies and the cities from which **they** had come – as we will see in the next file (see **Am – The Geographical Place-Names Who Returned**). Therefore, **they** were not cut off from the ancient promise of land and posterity made to **Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3)**, but rather **they** were the raw material from which **ADONAI** would now fulfill **His** glorious promise.[33]