



Ezra - Lesson 1-2

Chapters 1-2

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- The US had been a country for nearly 238 years, when only 85 years into our existence, we almost split into northern and southern nations
 - For a time, we were a northern nation and a southern nation
 - The United States
 - And the Confederate States
 - Today, we're Texas and a few other places that don't matter
 - Likewise, Israel was a united kingdom for only a brief period of time – 112 years
 - At the end of that 112 years, King Solomon died
 - And upon his death, God had declared that the Kingdom of Israel would become divided, because of Solomon's idolatry
 - The ten tribes in the north would split off under the leadership of Jeroboam, a leader from the most powerful tribe in the north, Ephraim
 - God Himself appointed Jeroboam to be the king of the North in 1 Kings 11
 - At that same time, a prophet came to Jeroboam and declared that God had given him the authority to rule over the 10 northern tribes after Solomon's death
 - And he would reign as long as he obeyed the Lord
 - Meanwhile, in the South, the remaining two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were ruled by Solomon's heir, his son Rehoboam
- During the centuries that followed, both the leadership of the North and the South generally went from bad to worse
 - The Northern Kingdom of Israel lasted for 209 years after the split
 - During that time, they set up their capital in Samaria
 - They established a false temple, a false priesthood, and a distorted version of the Law
 - And they were ruled by a succession of 18 kings, all of whom were considered to be bad kings – disobedient to the Covenant and following after a long list of abominations
 - Eventually, in 722 BC, God puts an end to the Northern Kingdom and scatters the 10 tribes through the Assyrians, whom He sent against Israel
 - The nation is taken captive
 - And the tribes are lost to history, even to today
 - The Southern Kingdom of Judah also has a history of ups and downs – more down than up
 - They have 11 bad kings, interspersed by 8 good kings
 - Many of the bad kings are as bad as any of the Northern kings
 - And the precious few good kings can only stem the tide of disobedience for a time
 - Yet, God dealt differently with the Southern Kingdom than He did with the Northern Kingdom
 - After 345 years, the Lord finally brought a consequence to the Southern

Kingdom, similar to the one He brought in the North

- The Lord delivered Judah and Benjamin into captivity at the hands of the invading Babylonians, under the authority of King Nebuchadnezzar
- But unlike the Northern Kingdom, the Lord eventually restored the Southern Kingdom to the land, starting 70 years later
- The Lord judged the Northern Kingdom, but He disciplined the Southern Kingdom
- The story of how God disciplined Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom plays out in an interesting pattern of threes
 - Nebuchadnezzar's army attacked Jerusalem a total of three times
 - In his first attack, he assaults the leadership of the nation
 - The nation's ills were directly the result of the corrupt will and faithlessness of its leaders
 - And as the kings went, so went the people
 - Therefore, if God is going to discipline the people and eventually restore them in a new form, He must begin with the corrupt leadership
 - So God directs Nebuchadnezzar to remove Israel's king and all the noblemen who rule with him
 - This first step happens in 605 BC
 - It's this first invasion that brings Daniel back to Babylon, since Daniel was a nobleman of Israel
 - After a few years, Nebuchadnezzar's army returned again to put down a rebellion of those who remained in Israel
 - In this second invasion, in 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Israel's economic power
 - He took Israel's craftsmen and teachers and spiritual advisors back to Babylon
 - Now, Israel was without leadership and without economic vitality
 - Still, Israel would not submit to Nebuchadnezzar's rule, so they rebelled again
 - So finally, we hear of the result in 2 Chron. 36

2 Chr. 36:15 The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place;

2 Chr. 36:16 but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy.

2 Chr. 36:17 Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave them all into his hand.

2 Chr. 36:18 All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his

officers, he brought them all to Babylon.

2 Chr. 36:19 Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles.

2 Chr. 36:20 Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia,

2 Chr. 36:21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

- In v.16, we hear the words no one wants to hear the Lord say concerning their sinfulness
 - The Lord declares that there was no remedy
 - The sin of Israel had not diminished, even after two attacks from Nebuchadnezzar and the collective voice of the prophets
 - So the Lord brought the Babylonian army back again in 586 BC for one last devastating attack
 - That attack resulted in the city's entire population leaving the city and the city itself being destroyed
 - Nothing was left intact and all the people who survived were led into captivity in Babylon
 - This third attack brought to fulfillment the Lord's promise to punish Israel
 - What followed was a period of captivity under Babylonian kings, and later, Medo-Persian kings, after the Medes defeated Babylon
 - The exact time of that captivity was seventy years, just as Jeremiah had promised to Israel
- But as we said, this is a period of discipline for Israel, which means the Lord always intended to restore the Southern Kingdom in due time (70 years to be exact)
 - And just as the Lord took three steps in bringing the nation into captivity, He also takes three steps in restoring the nation back to their land
 - Those three steps of restoration are recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah
 - The Book of Ezra records steps 1 and 2
 - While Nehemiah is the story of step 3
 - Even more interesting, is the way these three steps are arranged
 - The three steps of restoration mirror perfectly the three steps of judgment that the Lord brought through Nebuchadnezzar
 - We'll come back to that feature as we move through Ezra, and later, Nehemiah
- Ezra is the name of the book, and ancient Jewish tradition maintains that he is the author of the book
 - In fact, Ezra is believed to have authored Nehemiah and Chronicles as well

- Until the third century, Ezra and Nehemiah were a single book in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures
- Today, Ezra and Nehemiah are still combined in a single work
- Ezra was a scribe in Israel
 - Scribes were the literary class of Israel
 - They were responsible for guarding the Word of God, teaching it and for writing commentary or instructions concerning the Law
 - And as we see in Ezra's case, they were often the historians of the culture
- Not much is known about the man Ezra, apart from what's recorded in the book that bears his name and a little in Nehemiah
 - He was a contemporary of Nehemiah
 - And the Talmud claims he was a student of Baruch, who was Jeremiah's scribe (or teacher)
 - Based on historical references in his book, Ezra was probably born in Babylon during the captivity
 - The book itself has a curious chronology, or timeline, focusing on two periods of history
 - Chapters 1-6 focus on Cyrus, the king that permits Israel to return to her land
 - The second part of the book begins with Ezra's appearance, in Chapter 7
 - And between these Chapters 6-7 lies a gap of nearly 100 years
 - In that 100 year gap, the story of Esther takes place
 - Esther is ruling as queen in Persia during the period when Israel was working to re-establish itself in Jerusalem
 - Perhaps Ezra gives Chapters 1-6 as historical background, and then he begins his personal account in Chapter 7
 - Whatever the case, Ezra and Nehemiah record the final events of the Old Testament chronologically
 - The only prophet to write after Nehemiah is Malachi
 - And Matthew records the next events to take place in the Nation of Israel
- So let's start our study of Ezra, looking at the first step of Israel's restoration, which repeats the final two verses of Chronicles (another book of Ezra)

Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying:

Ezra 1:2 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Ezra 1:3 'Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of

the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:4 ‘Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.’”

- After 70 years of captivity, the Lord moves, as He promised, to bring Israel back to the land
 - Previously, the Lord has promised that there is still much He intends to do in Israel
 - He will raise and restore Israel in peace
 - He will raise up a Davidic King to rule them in righteousness
 - And He would heal their land
 - But in the course of making these things happen, the Lord will also reinforce a central truth of the scriptures
 - A repentant heart is an essential requirement to receive the Lord’s mercy
 - And so the means of restoration that the Lord chooses is designed to produce and expose the repentant heart of true Israel
 - So that as Israel humbled itself, the Lord would respond with another step of the restoration
- Here, we see the very beginning of that process
 - Cyrus, king of Persia, becomes an instrument of God to fulfill the words of Jeremiah
 - Specifically, the words are those of Jeremiah 29

Jer. 29:10 “For thus says the LORD, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.

Jer. 29:11 ‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

Jer. 29:12 ‘Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.

Jer. 29:13 ‘You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

- Medo-Persia defeated the Babylonian empire
 - They are the second power represented in the statue of Daniel 2
 - And Isaiah even names the future king who will fulfill Jeremiah

Is. 44:26 Confirming the word of His servant

And performing the purpose of His messengers.

It is I who says of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be inhabited!’

And of the cities of Judah, ‘They shall be built.’

And I will raise up her ruins again.

Is. 44:27 “It is I who says to the depth of the sea, ‘Be dried up!’

And I will make your rivers dry.

Is. 44:28 “It is I who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd!

And he will perform all My desire.’

And he declares of Jerusalem, ‘ She will be built,’

And of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid.’”

Is. 45:1 **Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed,**

Whom I have taken by the right hand,

To subdue nations before him

And to loose the loins of kings;

To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:

- Isaiah named Cyrus 200 years before the events even take place, evidence of God’s sovereignty
 - Clearly, the Lord is working to accomplish something important
 - So He’s announced His plans in advance and is orchestrating everything carefully to ensure His purpose is met
- So when time comes for the Lord to keep His promise in Jeremiah, through Cyrus, the Lord begins to move
 - Notice in v.1, the Lord “stirred up the spirit” of Cyrus to issue an edict
 - Cyrus, we can safely assume, had no personal interest in freeing the Jews, except that the Lord gave him that desire
 - There is evidence that Cyrus was made aware of the prophecies in Isaiah, perhaps by Daniel, who was serving in that court
 - So he came to understand he was the fulfillment of God’s promise
 - This is a clear example of the Lord’s sovereign capacity to direct men’s hearts as He wills
 - In fact, in v.2, Cyrus gives the Lord credit for his decision
 - Cyrus acknowledges that the Lord has made him ruler for a time
 - And the Lord has also commanded Cyrus to permit the Jews to go to Jerusalem to build a house for the Lord, meaning the temple
 - This may explain why the Lord chose to name Cyrus in advance
 - It served to persuade Cyrus that he was supposed to let Israel leave captivity
- Cyrus’ edict comes in his first year as king over Babylon, and it contains some interesting details
 - For example, he repeated references to the Lord as the God of Israel
 - And he acknowledges this God prefers to reside in Jerusalem
 - But it’s also clear he doesn’t understand the Lord is the One and only God
 - In fact, Isaiah goes on to say in Chapter 45, that Cyrus is not a believer
 - Taken together, it’s proof that the Lord can use anyone to suit His purposes

- But this doesn't require He reveal Himself fully, to the extent of bringing saving faith
- The offer Cyrus makes is that any among Israel who wish to journey back to Israel for this purpose are now free to leave
 - Every survivor of Israel is invited to leave, no matter where he lives
 - Cyrus is saying every Jew, no matter what their place in society
 - Whether they are a member of the king's court, a laborer or even a criminal serving time in prison, all are free to go
 - No one who wishes to serve God in Israel is barred from leaving
 - Secondly, Cyrus ordered that the Jews' neighbors give financial support to those who decide to return to the land
 - The people are to receive silver, gold and other goods
 - Also, they are to receive a freewill offering
 - All of these gifts are to be used to support the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem
 - This situation reminds us of the last time a captive Israel is released with a command to build a house for the Lord
 - After Israel departed Egypt, they leave with the riches of the nation
 - And those riches fund the construction of the tabernacle
 - Similarly, these gifts will fund the building of a temple
 - A reminder that those whom God calls, He equips for the work He has appointed
 - No true work of God has ever failed for lack of funding
- So then, Ezra reports how the nation responded to the king's edict

Ezra 1:5 Then the heads of fathers' households of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.

Ezra 1:6 All those about them encouraged them with articles of silver, with gold, with goods, with cattle and with valuables, aside from all that was given as a freewill offering.

Ezra 1:7 Also King Cyrus brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and put in the house of his gods;

Ezra 1:8 and Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

Ezra 1:9 Now this was their number: 30 gold dishes, 1,000 silver dishes, 29 duplicates;

Ezra 1:10 30 gold bowls, 410 silver bowls of a second kind and 1,000 other articles.

Ezra 1:11 All the articles of gold and silver numbered 5,400. Sheshbazzar

brought them all up with the exiles who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

- You might imagine that every Jew would get up immediately and flee, much like the generation that left Egypt
 - But only a remnant chose to return
 - Ezra says the heads of the households of Judah, Benjamin and Levi arose
 - Remember, these are the tribes that were taken into captivity by Babylon
 - The other ten tribes had been scattered centuries earlier, when attacked by Assyria
 - Most of Israel taken into captivity chose to remain behind in Medo-Persia
 - We can understand that decision when viewed from a human perspective
 - They had lived most or all their lives in this place
 - They had lives and possessions
 - Where in Jerusalem, there was nothing waiting for them
 - It was a desolate waste land, and repatriating the land would be a difficult and hard life
 - So most stayed put
 - But in v.5, we learn that some made the decision to go
 - Those whose hearts were stirred by the Lord
 - God determined that certain members of Israel would return and serve Him there
 - Once again, we see the Lord moving men according to His will
 - And it was the Lord's determination that made the difference between who went and who stayed
 - If you were stirred by the Lord's Spirit, you went to rebuild the temple
 - If your heart was not directed by the Lord in this way, you didn't go
- Those who stayed behind still served a purpose, by funding the trip for the rest of the Jewish nation
 - Not only did the Jews give donations, but so did the Gentiles
 - In fact, Cyrus himself brought articles of value
 - In particular, he returns to Israel the objects taken from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar when he conquered the temple
 - When one nation conquered another nation, it was customary for the conquering force to carry away images of the defeated gods
 - These idols would be displayed back home as testimony that these gods were impotent in the face of the conquering army
 - Since Israel had no images of Yahweh, according to the Ten Commandments, Nebuchadnezzar was forced to take other objects from the temple
 - He decided to take the temple utensils and other artifacts

- The effect was to preserve these things for Israel to take back now
- An inventory was taken of what was returned to Israel, and the count was substantial
 - Not only was it considerable wealth, but it meant Israel didn't need to use other wealth to re-create these artifacts
 - The inventory lists thousands and thousands of gold and silver objects
 - Ezra says the total was 5,400 objects, though his earlier counts don't equal that number
 - He likely only listed the major objects in his earlier counts
 - And this is the total of all objects, large and small
 - In any case, one item is conspicuously absent from the inventory: the Ark of the Covenant
 - There is no evidence that Babylon held on to this object
 - Most scholars assume Nebuchadnezzar simply destroyed it for its gold
 - And we see clearly here that it was never returned to Israel
 - In fact, Josephus wrote that the second temple never contained the Ark in the Holy of Holies
 - According to tradition, only a rock, called the "Foundation Stone"
 - Finally, Chapter 1 ends with an important turning point in the history of Israel
 - Ezra says the exiles went up from Babylon to Jerusalem
 - Once again, Israel is returning to the place God has given them
 - In fact, when you skim over the first chapter, you immediately notice a strong parallel to Exodus
 - We already noted the comparison to taking Egypt's wealth
 - But notice the many other references to the story of Israel in Egypt, including the story of Joseph
 - Judah, Benjamin, Levites
 - The Lord's providence
 - And the intention to fulfill promises through Gentile rulers
 - Once again, the Lord moves to bring Israel to Himself
- In the next chapter, Ezra lists the 50,000 or so who made the trip

Ezra 2:1 Now these are the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city.

- Out of the millions of Jews who entered the land under Joshua, and the millions who were taken in Nebuchadnezzar's conquests, only 50,000 return
 - This is proof of a basic principle of Old Testament theology
 - True Israel has always been only a remnant in the nation

- While a large number may call themselves Israel, only a small number are the saints who know Him truly
- Here is one rare moment when the difference is easy to see
- Only those stirred by God's Spirit return
 - This doesn't mean that all believing Israel left and only unbelieving Israel remained in the land
 - We know some true followers stayed behind
 - The story of Esther tells us about what happens to some of these believing Jews who stayed outside the land
 - And others joined the nation later
 - Still, the vast majority who remain behind eventually ceased to be Israel, even in name
- When these exiles return, they take a route almost exactly the same as the one Abraham took when he first entered the land
 - They travel northeast to Aleppo, or present day Damascus
 - And then southward into Judea and to Jerusalem
 - This was the only way to make such a trip, since the desert between Babylon and Jerusalem is uncrossable
- Most of the rest of this chapter of Ezra consists of the count of those who left for Jerusalem
- It forms a genealogy as well, and as such, it demonstrates the nation hadn't lost its identity during the years of captivity
 - The list is long, and the names are unfamiliar and difficult to pronounce in some cases
 - Since this is VBVM, we don't shy away from long lists of odd names
 - Let's read the list

Ezra 2:2 These came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum and Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:

Ezra 2:3 the sons of Parosh, 2,172;

Ezra 2:4 the sons of Shephatiah, 372;

Ezra 2:5 the sons of Arah, 775;

Ezra 2:6 the sons of Pahath-moab of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,812;

Ezra 2:7 the sons of Elam, 1,254;

Ezra 2:8 the sons of Zattu, 945;

Ezra 2:9 the sons of Zaccai, 760;

Ezra 2:10 the sons of Bani, 642;

Ezra 2:11 the sons of Bebai, 623;

Ezra 2:12 the sons of Azgad, 1,222;

Ezra 2:13 the sons of Adonikam, 666;

- Ezra 2:14** the sons of Bigvai, 2,056;
Ezra 2:15 the sons of Adin, 454;
Ezra 2:16 the sons of Ater of Hezekiah, 98;
Ezra 2:17 the sons of Bezai, 323;
Ezra 2:18 the sons of Jorah, 112;
Ezra 2:19 the sons of Hashum, 223;
Ezra 2:20 the sons of Gibbar, 95;
Ezra 2:21 the men of Bethlehem, 123;
Ezra 2:22 the men of Netophah, 56;
Ezra 2:23 the men of Anathoth, 128;
Ezra 2:24 the sons of Azmaveth, 42;
Ezra 2:25 the sons of Kiriath-arim, Chephirah and Beeroth, 743;
Ezra 2:26 the sons of Ramah and Geba, 621;
Ezra 2:27 the men of Michmas, 122;
Ezra 2:28 the men of Bethel and Ai, 223;
Ezra 2:29 the sons of Nebo, 52;
Ezra 2:30 the sons of Magbish, 156;
Ezra 2:31 the sons of the other Elam, 1,254;
Ezra 2:32 the sons of Harim, 320;
Ezra 2:33 the sons of Lod, Hadid and Ono, 725;
Ezra 2:34 the men of Jericho, 345;
Ezra 2:35 the sons of Senaah, 3,630.
Ezra 2:36 The priests: the sons of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973;
Ezra 2:37 the sons of Immer, 1,052;
Ezra 2:38 the sons of Pashhur, 1,247;
Ezra 2:39 the sons of Harim, 1,017.
Ezra 2:40 The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, 74.
Ezra 2:41 The singers: the sons of Asaph, 128.
Ezra 2:42 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, the sons of Shobai, in all 139.
Ezra 2:43 The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth,
Ezra 2:44 the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon,
Ezra 2:45 the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub,
Ezra 2:46 the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmi, the sons of Hanan,
Ezra 2:47 the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah,
Ezra 2:48 the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam,
Ezra 2:49 the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai,
Ezra 2:50 the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephisim,
Ezra 2:51 the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur,
Ezra 2:52 the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha,

Ezra 2:53 the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Temah,

Ezra 2:54 the sons of Neziah, the sons of Hatipha.

Ezra 2:55 The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Hassophereth, the sons of Peruda,

Ezra 2:56 the sons of Jaalah, the sons of Darkon, the sons of Giddel,

Ezra 2:57 the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil, the sons of Pochereth-hazzebaim, the sons of Ami.

Ezra 2:58 All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.

- You may have noticed a couple of familiar names like Nehemiah and Mordecai,
 - But these are the not the same men as those who bear that name elsewhere in Scripture
 - The Nehemiah of the book doesn't enter Jerusalem for another 100 years and
 - And the Mordecai of Esther remained in Susa, in the Persian Empire
 - The purpose and importance of the list is to establish that these returning families could justifiably lay claim to being the same Israel that left 70 years earlier
 - Each family is listed as either the sons of someone or the men of somewhere
 - These are the two ways a person could prove they could lay claim to being eligible to return to Israel
 - Either they traced their family to a father who was taken from Israel by Nebuchadnezzar
 - Or they demonstrated they owned land in former Judea
 - This list is repeated in Nehemiah 7, so you will hear it read a second time if you take that study as well
 - In that second telling, Ezra records different numbers
 - The numbers are mostly larger in the second telling, although some are fewer in number
 - Remember, the first list was made nearly 100 years before the one in Nehemiah
 - Ezra's second list is likely an updated count, based on how many sons existed in each family at that later point in time
 - We'll look at that again, when we get to Nehemiah
- In the list, we also see a division of families based on role
 - For example, there are priestly families listed
 - Of the original 24 divisions of the priesthood, only four are represented in this list
 - But, nearly 9% of all returnees were priests, so that would have been enough to serve the needs of the people
 - Other Levites (who supported the priests) were also included, though far fewer than before

- Also, there were temple servants, another group of Israelites David established to assist the priests
- Finally, we have the sons of Solomon's servants, who also assisted in the temple
- Then, we have another group of dubious origins, who try to join the group leaving Persia

Ezra 2:59 Now these are those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan and Immer, but they were not able to give evidence of their fathers' households and their descendants, whether they were of Israel:

Ezra 2:60 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Nekoda, 652.

Ezra 2:61 Of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and he was called by their name.

Ezra 2:62 These searched among their ancestral registration, but they could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood.

Ezra 2:63 The governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until a priest stood up with Urim and Thummim.

- A group of families applied to return, but they were rejected, because they couldn't demonstrate that they traced their family heritage to Israel
 - This small moment demonstrates two important details for the record of Israel in Scripture
 - First, it gives evidence of something that is commonly assumed elsewhere in Scripture: the Jews were meticulous record keepers when it came to genealogies
 - The nation was formed by God on the basis of a birth relationship and a covenant promise, which was transferred by birthright
 - So tracing genealogies is an essential part of Jewish life and history
 - It is one of the main tools the Lord has used over the millennia to protect the integrity of His people
 - Here, we see it at work
 - Secondly, this moment confirms that during the exile, the nation continued to maintain its identity, including continuing to maintain records of birth and land ownership
 - The nation has been preserved in exile, and the records have also been preserved, to ensure their identity isn't lost
 - So that when a group tries to invade Israel, they are unable to join
 - No other group of humanity, throughout all history, has ever maintained their identity to this degree while outside their land
 - In vs.61-63, a second group applies to be considered priests, but once again, can't show they are eligible for the priesthood

- This group is allowed to return, since it's clear they are Jewish
- But they were prohibited from participating in the temple services until the Urim and Thummim were set up and operating with a high priest
 - Remember from our Exodus study, that these objects were used by the high priest to inquire of the Lord's will
 - The high priest would ask "yes" or "no" questions, and these special stones would show the answer in some way
 - The plan was to ask God if these men were eligible to be priests
- Finally, Ezra records the wealth of this group and the diversity of life that emigrated from Persia

Ezra 2:64 The whole assembly numbered 42,360,

Ezra 2:65 besides their male and female servants who numbered 7,337; and they had 200 singing men and women.

Ezra 2:66 Their horses were 736; their mules, 245;

Ezra 2:67 their camels, 435; their donkeys, 6,720.

Ezra 2:68 Some of the heads of fathers' households, when they arrived at the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, offered willingly for the house of God to restore it on its foundation.

Ezra 2:69 According to their ability they gave to the treasury for the work 61,000 gold drachmas and 5,000 silver minas and 100 priestly garments.

Ezra 2:70 Now the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants lived in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

- The whole assembly with men, women, children, servants, entertainers were nearly 50,000 people
- That's a large group to travel anywhere, but it's a small number to resettle a desolate land
 - By comparison, the last time Israel entered the land to occupy it, it came by the millions
 - This time, there won't be enough people to guarantee victory in battle
 - The work of building will be harder with fewer to do the work
 - Everything will be more challenging
- As they leave and eventually arrive in the land, they arrive at the temple mount
 - There couldn't have been much there to receive them
 - The first temple had been completely destroyed by Babylon
 - But they had been sent specifically to rebuild this structure, so they knew what they had to do
- In what was probably a very emotional moment, the heads of some of the families offered willingly and immediately to give of their own possessions to make it possible to build the temple

- The treasury for the work swelled to a fortune
- A *drachma* was equivalent to a *denarius*, which was one day's wage for a working man
- So just the 61,000 gold coins represented 167 years of wages
 - If we assume a working man earns \$50,000/year, then this is about \$8M in donations, in today's dollars
- Clearly, the people of Israel are moved in a dramatic way by the site of their temple in rubble, and so they have hearts ready to do what it required
 - So as our first lesson ends, we find a small contingent of Israel settled in towns in the land, working and living and preparing to rebuild
 - But the work of rebuilding is just beginning
 - It will be another seven months before the work even starts
 - And it will take much longer before the true work of restoring Israel becomes evident