

## Lesson 6

### Ezra 2:1-2a

Now these are the children of the province that went up out of the captivity, of those which had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away unto Babylon, and came again unto Jerusalem and Judah, every one unto his city; 2 Which came with Zerubbabel: Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah.

The key phrase in those verses is “came again” in verse 1. This was not a new people going to a new place. This was an old people going to an old place.

That each returned to his own town emphasizes the continuity with the pre-exile community. The returning exiles were claiming their territorial inheritance and reaffirming their roots in and rights to the land.

The word “province” in verse 1 probably refers to Judah rather than to Babylon.

A big question with Chapter 2 is whether it is describing the first return or a later return.

Because Sheshbazzar is not mentioned by name in this chapter (the governor is mentioned, which may be Sheshbazzar) and because Zerubbabel is mentioned by name in this chapter, some have suggested that Chapter 2 is describing a later return than we saw in Chapter 1.

Haggai makes it clear that Zerubbabel and Jeshua were in Jerusalem by the second year of Darius (520 BC). Thus, some suggest that Ezra 1 is describing the first return in 538 BC, and Ezra 2 is describing a later return that occurred some time before 520 BC.

I think the better view is to see Ezra 2 as a description of the first return that occurred in 538 BC. We have already seen how important dates are to the author of Ezra, and it would seem odd to suddenly be discussing a later return without any temporal marker given in the text. Also, 3:1 begins with a temporal marker to the seventh month, which is without any context if it does not refer back to the first year of Cyrus’ reign mentioned in Chapter 1. Likewise, 3:8 refers to the second year of their coming, which would seem to suggest that Chapter 2 is describing the first return.

Several of the leaders’ names in verse 2 are familiar. Jeshua was the high priest, and is referred to as Joshua in Haggai and Zechariah. (According to Haggai 1:1 he was the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, which would make him the grandson of Seraiah, the high priest before the exile in 2 Kings 25:18.) The name Jeshua means “salvation.” It is the OT equivalent of the name Jesus.

Jeshua, the High Priest, and Zerubbabel, the grandson of king Jehoiachin, play a major role in the prophecies of Zechariah. So close was their partnership, that Zechariah used it as a foretaste of the perfect regime that was to come, when priesthood and royalty would be perfectly united in Jesus Christ.

And as the book of Hebrews tells us, that combination in a single person could happen only under a new covenant because kings came from the tribe of Judah while priests came from the tribe of Levi. So, to those today who believe that the old covenant was never intended to pass away, I would ask them to read Zechariah. Either the old covenant passed away or Zechariah's prophecies failed – those are our only options.

## The Genealogies of Christ

It was vital that a lineal descendant of King David return to Jerusalem so that one day the King of Kings could occupy the throne of David – which Luke 1:32 and Acts 2:30 tell us is what Jesus did in the first century. Zerubbabel, the godly grandson of the wicked King Jehoiachin, was a vital link in the plan of redemption.

Do we find Zerubbabel anywhere in the genealogy of Christ? Yes. Luke traces the genealogy from King David through his son Nathan, while Matthew traces the genealogy through Solomon. But the two lines cross in Zerubbabel and his father, Shealtiel.

**Matthew 1:12** “And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat **Zorobabel**.”

**Luke 3:27** “Which was the son of Joanna, which was the son of Rhesa, which was the son of **Zorobabel**, which was the son of Salathiel, which was the son of Neri.”

To say that those two verses raise some questions is the understatement of the day!

How, for example, do we explain the presence of Shealtiel and his son Zerubbabel? We find that pair in both Matthew's genealogy of Jesus and Luke's genealogy of Jesus, and yet Shealtiel's father is different in each, as is Zerubbabel's son. How is that explained?

One possible explanation is that they are different father and son pairs. Yes, the names are the same between Matthew and Luke, but that is about where the similarity ends. As we just mentioned, they have different parents and children. Also, they are descended from different sons of David, with Matthew going back to Solomon and Luke going back to Nathan. Also, if you count back from Jesus to Zerubbabel, you get 11 generations in Matthew and 20 generations in Luke (although there may be some gaps in Matthew's genealogy).

What if the two are the same people in both genealogies? Then how do we explain the different fathers of Shealtiel – Neri in Luke and Jechonias in Matthew? In that case, the most likely explanation is that Shealtiel was the product of a levirate marriage. (The word “levirate” does not come from the name Levi, but rather from the Latin word “levir” for a husband's brother.)

A levirate marriage occurred when a man died childless. Rather than have that man's line come to an end, his brother would father a child with his widow, and that child would then legally be the heir of the man who had died childless. (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) In this case, Neri would have died childless, and his brother, Jechonias (who was King Jehoiachin) would have fathered a child with Neri's widow. In that case, either Neri or Jechonias could be referred to as the father of Shealtiel.

But that does not entirely solve the problem for us. If Neri and Jehoiachin were brothers, then why

don't they have the same father? Matthew 1:11 tells us that Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin, and Luke 3:28 tells us that Melchi was the father of Neri. The answer is simple – if this theory is correct, then they must have been half-brothers with the same mother but different fathers. That would also explain how Zerubbabel could appear in both genealogies of Christ even though one traces down through Nathan and the other traces down through Solomon.

Do we see a levirate marriage anywhere else in the Bible other than with Shealtiel? Yes – we see it with Zerubbabel! 1 Chronicles 3:19 says that Zerubbabel's father was Pedaiiah, and Ezra 3:2 says that Zerubbabel's father was Shealtiel (as do Matthew and Luke). Again, the most likely explanation was a levirate marriage.

Should it surprise us to see so many levirate marriages in the royal line? Not really, for two reasons. In a royal line, you would expect siblings to have a higher death rate than normal, and, in a royal line, you would expect an increased concern with maintaining family lines. Putting those two things together suggests that one might expect to see more levirate marriages in a royal line than elsewhere.

Another possible explanation for having two fathers is adoption. This is likewise something that one might expect to see more of than usual in royal families. A king whose brother had died (perhaps with a little help from the king!) might be interested in keeping a close eye on his royal nephews. We see an example of adoption in the book of Esther.

(Esther 2:7) “And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.”

We need to pause and consider one more question about this before we move on. Jehoiachin/Jeconiah was such an evil king that Jeremiah 22:30 said, “Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.”

And yet right there in Matthew 1:12 we find King Jehoiachin listed among the ancestors of Jesus. How is that explained?

First, I think the phrase “in his days” in Jeremiah 22:30 is important – the focus of that verse was on the lifetime of Jehoiachin. He would not live to see any of his seed ruling from the throne of David – and we know that he did not.

Second, we should compare Jeremiah 22:30 with Jeremiah 36:30 – “Therefore thus saith the LORD of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost.” That verse was written about Jehoiachin's father even though Jehoiachin did sit on David's throne for about three months! Yes, he sat on the throne, but he was a powerless puppet king. Again, the point of Jeremiah 36:30 is that Jehoiakim would not have a son who would “sit enthroned” where the Hebrew word used there denotes some degree of permanence and security. We see a similar pronouncement about Jehoiachin in Jeremiah 22:30.

Third, even if Jeremiah 22:30 was a curse on Jehoiachin and all his future descendants (as some

suggest), that curse seems to have been lifted. Jeremiah 22:24 says, “As I live, saith the LORD, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence.” And yet in Haggai 2:23 we read, “In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts.” The ring came off, but the ring was put back on.

One last question about Zerubbabel. We know from other Bible books that Zerubbabel was of the house of David, and the royal link between David and Jesus. But why is that all important connection not mentioned anywhere in Ezra or Nehemiah? The prophets speak about it, but not Ezra and Nehemiah. Why? I think it was because the purpose of this return was to restore the temple and proper worship -- but it was not to restore the Davidic kingdom. That would come much later when Jesus would occupy the throne of David.

In Acts 1:6, the apostles asked Jesus, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” If that question had been asked in Ezra’s day, the answer would have been no. But when that question was asked in Acts 1, the answer was yes in the very next chapter. Acts 15 also tells us that it was Jesus who restored the kingdom of David – not Zerubbabel.

(Acts 15:15-16) “And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up.”

(Luke 1:32) “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.”

## Back to Ezra 2

The Nehemiah listed in verse 2 is not the Nehemiah who returned many years later in 445 BC, and the Mordecai listed here is not the Mordecai from the book of Esther. Seraiah was also the name of Ezra’s father (7:1), and Bigvai is a Persian name that also occurs in the Elephantine Papyri as the governor of Judah following Nehemiah. But, again, considering the time and place, the most likely explanation is that we have different people with the same names.

There is a similar list of names in Nehemiah 7:7, but that list contains one additional name, Nahamani, which some suggest may have been lost in the process of copying. I tend to agree with that suggestion because with that additional name we have yet another indication of the continuity between the exiles and the pre-exile community in that with the addition of that name, the list includes 12 leaders.

## Ezra 2:2b-20

2b The number of the men of the people of Israel: 3 The children of Parosh, two thousand an hundred seventy and two. 4 The children of Shephatiah, three hundred seventy and two. 5 The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five. 6 The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and twelve. 7 The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 8 The children of Zattu, nine hundred forty and five. 9 The
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children of Zaccai, seven hundred and threescore. 10 The children of Bani, six hundred forty and two. 11 The children of Bebai, six hundred twenty and three. 12 The children of Azgad, a thousand two hundred twenty and two. 13 The children of Adonikam, six hundred sixty and six. 14 The children of Bigvai, two thousand fifty and six. 15 The children of Adin, four hundred fifty and four. 16 The children of Ater of Hezekiah, ninety and eight. 17 The children of Bezai, three hundred twenty and three. 18 The children of Jorah, an hundred and twelve. 19 The children of Hashum, two hundred twenty and three. 20 The children of Gibbar, ninety and five.

Verses 3-20 are the names of the clans that returned. The end of verse 2 describes them as the men of the people of Israel.

The Bible usually reserves “Israel” for the entire nation of twelve tribes or for the Northern Kingdom that fell to Assyria. Why is “Israel” used here? It is most likely used here as another indication that this group was the heir to God’s covenants to the nation as a whole. The restoration that was about to occur was going to go all the way back to the beginning – which is the only place to go if you want a true restoration.

The names in this list are nearly identical to those in Nehemiah 7, but there is more variation in the numbers between the two lists. One commentator suggests this may be due to what he describes as “the notorious difficulty in copying Hebrew numbers.” Vertical strokes were used for units, horizontal strokes were used for tens, and the initial letter in the Hebrew word *meah* was used for hundreds. Single strokes could easily be overlooked or miscopied.

“While the proper names are in general agreement, the numerical notations frequently disagree. These discrepancies seemingly occur at random. Neither list consistently has the higher number. [One article] provides a table listing twenty-nine differences between the lists of Neh 7 and Ezra 2 out of the 153 individual numerals or ciphers. Observing that the divergences usually occur in proper names and in numerical statistics, he believes the discrepancies between the lists to be the result of scribal error and shows how the Hebrew numerals could have been misinterpreted. ... Names and numbers were the great bane of copyists. Although scribes took great care to ensure the accuracy of their work, genealogies and numerical lists invariably proved to be the most difficult of all passages to accurately reproduce.”

The article referenced in that quote is a 1954 article from the Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, and I will post it on the website.

Several of these clan names occur elsewhere. Eleven of the names are also found in Ezra 8 among those who accompanied Ezra to Jerusalem. Fourteen are listed in Nehemiah 10 as signing the agreement of separation.

Parosh in verse 2 is the Hebrew word for “flea.” Some members of this clan came with Ezra in Ezra 8:3. Others helped Nehemiah repair the wall in Nehemiah 3:25. But others of this clan were guilty of ignoring God’s law against intermarriage in Nehemiah 10:14 – which tells us that at least one “flea” did not “flee” when he should have!

The name Shephatiah in verse 4 was also the name of one of Jeremiah's enemies in Jeremiah 38:1. It is possible that he was carried into captivity after Zedekiah's rebellion and that some of his descendants were now returning. If so, they must have had the respect for Jeremiah that their ancestor lacked.

Arah in verse 5 is most likely the Arah mentioned in Nehemiah 6:18. If so, then one of Arah's descendent had intermarried with Tobiah's family, who was Nehemiah's adversary. Tobiah was a Persian official, who along with Sanballat and Geshem, tried to stop the reconstruction of the walls. His marriage into Arah's family tied him to an aristocratic Jewish family and caused some of the Jews to pledge their allegiance to him instead of to Nehemiah. Notice that this problem was caused by someone who violated God's law about marriage – a problem that Ezra will address later.

Since "Pahath-moab" in verse 6 literally means "governor of Moab," he or more likely his ancestor may have been a governor in Moab prior to the exile.

The name Zaccai in verse 9 has also been found in an archaeological discovery on a stamp seal. The name Azgad means "mighty is Gad" and has been found in Aramaic documents from Egypt.

The Hezekiah in verse 16 is most likely not the royal Hezekiah.

### **Ezra 2:21-35**

21 The children of Bethlehem, an hundred twenty and three. 22 The men of Netophah, fifty and six. 23 The men of Anathoth, an hundred twenty and eight. 24 The children of Azmaveth, forty and two. 25 The children of Kirjatharim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty and three. 26 The children of Ramah and Gaba, six hundred twenty and one. 27 The men of Michmas, an hundred twenty and two. 28 The men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred twenty and three. 29 The children of Nebo, fifty and two. 30 The children of Magbish, an hundred fifty and six. 31 The children of the other Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. 32 The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty. 33 The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred twenty and five. 34 The children of Jericho, three hundred forty and five. 35 The children of Senaah, three thousand and six hundred and thirty.

Verses 21-35 describe people by their geography as opposed to their clan, and we previously discussed some possible reasons for that distinction.

There are some commentaries that place Gibbar in verse 20 with the place names rather than the people names. The parallel passage in Nehemiah 7:25 has Gibeon rather than Gibbar, and Gibeon is about five miles northwest of Jerusalem.

Some of the descriptions begin with "the *sons* of" while others begin with "the *men* of." The NIV obliterates this distinction, and, while it is true that the phrases appear to be synonymous here, it should make you wonder what else the NIV is obliterating. (If there is ambiguity in the original text, a good translation carries that ambiguity over into the English version—a bad translation does

not.)

By listing people both by clan and by geographical location, God is confirming their connection to those who occupied the land prior to the exile. This was not just some new group with which God decided to start over, but rather this group was very closely connected to those who had been taken captive. These people were *returning* – and that word makes no sense unless they are connected to those who were taken away.

Bethlehem in verse 21 is about five miles south of Jerusalem.

Anathoth in verse 23 was Jeremiah's hometown (Jeremiah 1:1).

Ramah in verse 26 was Samuel's home. Geba in verse 26 was located five and a half miles northeast of Jerusalem and was described as the northern limit of the Jewish people in the Persian period (Zechariah 14:10).

Micmash in verse 27 was where the Philistines camped prior to the big battle with Saul in 1 Samuel 13.

Lod in verse 33 is seven miles southeast of Joppa, and is located near Israel's international airport.

Jericho in verse 34 is about 18 miles east of Jerusalem.

### **Ezra 2:36-39**

36 The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. 37 The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. 38 The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. 39 The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen.
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Having listed the laymen, the author now lists the temple ministers in verses 36-58. The first four of these verses lists the priests, which appear to have made up about 10% of the returnees.

While this number seems high, we should remember that priests had the most to gain from a return to Jerusalem. They would have a steady source of income combined with a high social status. Also, they were very much needed by a group whose mission was to rebuild the temple and restore proper worship.

David had organized the priests into 24 family groups in 1 Chronicles 24, but only four of those 24 groups are represented here. These four groups are also the only ones listed several generations later when Ezra returned (Ezra 10:18-22).

According to Jewish tradition, the original 24 courses of priests were reconstituted from these 4 families, with each of the reconstituted families taking the name of the one of the original families. If so, that would explain how Zechariah in Luke 1:5 was of the course of Abia or Abijah.

Notice that the house of Jeshua is mentioned in verse 36. Some point to this verse as evidence that the author was getting these figures from a much later list (at which point Jeshua, they say, had

973 descendants). But all the verse says is that the *house* of Jeshua had 973 people; that is, it is the clan or family size rather than the number of descendants. Also, we could be seeing another Jeshua here; it was a very common name, and in fact we do see another Jeshua in the very next verse.

Jedaiah was the 2nd order in 1 Chronicles 24:7. Immer was the 16th order in 24:14. Harim was the 3rd order in 24:8.

Pashur is not listed in 1 Chronicles 24. 1 Chronicles 9:12, however, tells us that Pashur was the son of Malchijah, and Malchijah was the 5th order in 1 Chronicles 24:9.

Later in Ezra 10:22, six of Pashur's sons were encouraged by Ezra to divorce their foreign wives.

### **Ezra 2:40-42**

40 The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy and four. 41 The singers: the children of Asaph, an hundred twenty and eight. 42 The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, in all an hundred thirty and nine.
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Verses 40-42 list the Levites, the singers, and the gatekeepers. Each of these groups is listed to emphasize the continuity of those who returned with those who were carried away.

Jeshua the Levite in verse 40 is not the same Jeshua from verse 2 who was the High Priest – again, it was a common name.

The Levites were members of the tribe of Levi who were not also descendants of Aaron. They were prohibited from offering sacrifices on the altar. Because they had no land inheritance, they lived in 48 Levitical cities and were supported by tithes. They were butchers, doorkeepers, singers, scribes, teachers, and sometimes even temple beggars.

The first thing we notice about the Levites listed here is that their number was small compared to the number of priests. Later, Ezra would have only 38 Levites travel back with him. (Ezra 8:15-20) This may have been because the Levites would have had no inheritance to return to. (Although Ezra 7:24 tells us they were also exempt from taxes.) Other possibilities are that fewer Levites were deported initially because they were from the poorer class, or the Levites may have moved over to secular work during the exile.

Ezra will describe his problem in finding enough Levites in Ezra 8:15-30, which tells us that the problem did not go away any time soon.

The extremely small number of Levites is very strong evidence *against* the common modernist view that the law was actually written or rewritten during this time, as opposed to during the time of Moses. In the law (Numbers 18:21, 26), it is assumed that the Levites would greatly outnumber the priests because, for example, the Levites received the tithes and passed only a tenth (a tithe of the tithe) to the priests. (That implies that at that time priests were about 10% of the tribe of Levi.) Plus, under the Law, the Levites lived in 48 Levitical cities—whereas here we hardly have 48



Levites! Had the law been rewritten during this time as some argue, it would never have reached us in the form that we now have it. “Nothing proves more clearly how mistaken is the view that in post-exilic times, the Torah was still being added to and revised.”