

**Ezra Chapter 2** documents the names of the families of the Captivity who took advantage of the opportunity to return to their homeland. They had held to their heritage and passed it on to succeeding generations while captive in a distant foreign land. They held dear the memories of the towns that had been their homes for generations before. These towns had been allotted to them by Joshua when they had entered and conquered and taken possession of the Promised Land. Their roots went deep, for this was the land promised Abraham 1500 years before. Their ancestors had eagerly occupied the parcels allotted them by God though Joshua when they crossed the Jordan after forty years in the wilderness. (Note that these who actually entered the land then were the children of those who had originally left Egypt with Moses on the night of the Passover but had hesitated in unbelief at the border.) But now in Persia, many generations later, history was repeating itself.. Though again captives and servants in a foreign land, their spiritual leaders and the family heads had valued the promises and passed them on to their children and grandchildren. When the call came to return they were ready and willing. It was a long way, 530 miles “as the crow flies,” but no humans or crows could survive it. Taking the longer but survivable route would take four months to cover 900 miles. But the memories were so precious they eagerly departed to go *home*. Psalm 137 is a wistful lament of the faithful, refusing to sing happy folk songs for their masters in Babylon. They were ready to go.

So Jehovah is delighted to display the faithful hearts of His people. Hearts that were toward Him despite the discipline He had applied to them. Subdued but ready to return and to obey. He lovingly recorded their names for posterity in none other than His inspired, Holy Scriptures And there they are written *forever!* This reminds one of the Lamb’s Book of Life. Is your name written there?

He first names ten faithful men, leaders of the people. Then he named and numbered the families of those returning. ??(count them)?? families, 42,360 souls. Then he numbered various special classes of people: the priests, the Levites, 200 singers, the porters, door keepers,\* Solomon’s servants, the Nethinims. All were going HOME!

FREE!^^ But they would always remain under the rule of foreign kings.

\*only legitimate Israelites who could document their ancestry could enter the temple

But not to a life of ease, for they must repossess and occupy their land again. This despite opposition from peoples surrounding them who had been imported to replace them 70 years before when they had been conquered and deported.

As we progress though the history of the repatriates take note the care taken to identify the true Israelites. From the beginning God required His people maintain separation from the Gentiles. They were to be *Exclusive!* They are God’s chosen race and nation.

*Exodus 19:6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.*

So the believers in the present age, comprising the Church today, are to be exclusive. They are to guard the Lord’s Table as to who they receive, maintaining godly order and discipline, 1Corinthians 5.

There is more to the story not told in Ezra or Nehemiah. Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Haggai relate details of the captivity. The book of Esther, set years later, tells of those who had chosen not to return. Read together they tell a fascinating story of God’s mercy and faithfulness with His wayward people.

**Chapter 3** tells of spiritual activity in the land on the part of the returners. Two men took the lead. They were Jozadak the High Priest, the religious leader, and Zerubbabel the secular leader, the Prince of Judah. Their first action was to build the altar for burnt offerings. Its title is given: The Altar of the God of Israel. Though they had set up the altar there remained a fear upon the people because of the inhabitants of the land. These were foreigners who had been brought there to resettle the land after the Jews were carried away. The seventy years had allowed time for two or three generations of the foreigners to settle in.

The Jews who had returned resumed their religious feasts and days sticking to the calendar set down by Moses. They happened to be in the middle of their calendar, looking ahead from the Day of Atonement to the Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths. How appropriate. There they were, back in their land, but still in temporary living quarters.

The people had a giving spirit, cheerfully contributing to the needed materials and supplies. The Holy Spirit was working among them, as He had in their ancestors building the Tabernacle in the wilderness almost a thousand years before.

The “good old days” always seem to hold a special place in the hearts of the elderly. This occasion was no exception. Indeed there was a stark difference between the new temple and the original built by Solomon. We can tell that by the dimensions given in scripture for each. Nevertheless there it was before their eyes, and they shouted and sang for joy.

But the aged who had seen the original were overcome with sadness and they wept aloud. Either way, the mixed chorus of the joyous and the mournful was music to Jehovah’s ears. We understand, as nowadays we sing sometimes when remembering the Lord together “with joy and sorrow mingling we do remember thee.” That “noise” is heard afar off. indeed.

The foundation was laid, now to build upon it.

*1Corinthians 3:9 For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*