

Ezra 2

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 October 2025

Preacher: Billy Joe Calvert

[0 : 00] Now, context, we know that Ezra is writing retrospectively, so he's writing of things that happened before he came into Jerusalem. So this is the return of the Babylonian captivity.

! We have a tendency, I believe it is, to read chapters such as this and try to make our way through them without giving them much thought, without pausing to consider why are they there.

But that cannot be the case when we come to this passage because this passage is also found within the pages of the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah chapter 7. It does not encompass all of the 7th chapter of Nehemiah, but it does encompass the latter half of it.

And in context there, Nehemiah, who comes even later historically than Ezra, Nehemiah comes in as the political leader, not a political leader, but as a political assigned individual to rebuild the walls. And what Ezra is spiritually, Nehemiah is politically, and that is he's leading the nation, which is not really an independent nation, but is really just a people group of the Persian Empire who are inhabiting Jerusalem.

[1 : 33] And through his leadership, he decides in the 7th chapter of the book of Nehemiah to count and to record the amount of people that are there. Nehemiah, as he's getting ready to record those inhabitants of Jerusalem, which we see a lot of names in the book of Nehemiah, and when we get there we'll understand it.

He finds the record of the genealogy of those who had returned. Now the question Bible scholars ask is whose record came first? Was it Nehemiah's or was it Ezra's?

We don't really know. Ezra is probably writing from the Persian Empire. He's probably writing from Babylon itself as he's looking over the record of those who returned. And Nehemiah is writing from the genealogical record that is recorded for us in the city of Jerusalem.

Either way, their numbers match. There is one unique thing that is different in Nehemiah 7 than we find for us in Ezra chapter 2. And that is when we are introduced to those who came back.

You'll see it in just a moment. Ezra gives us 11 leaders and then the number of people who went with them. Nehemiah gives 12 leaders. Now that should resonate with us because we know that there are 12 tribes in the nation of Israel.

[2 : 47] So Nehemiah adds that 12th individual and records for us that he came there. So either way what we see is the entirety of the people of God coming back, though it is a small number.

Now remember that, because I think it bears weight here, is that when we read this, what we are looking at is a very small minority of the people who actually come back to inhabit Jerusalem.

It's a very small minority. And that bears a little weight as we would see our passage. So let's read tonight. Again, we won't read the listing of all the names.

But we will at least read the first 11 as they're recorded for us here in verse 2. And then we'll kind of see the subgroups of those people who came back and we'll finish out the chapter, okay? 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.

These came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, that's not the Nehemiah of the book of Nehemiah, by the way, Saraiah, Reliah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvi, Rahum, and Bana.

[3 : 58] Another side note, that's not the Mordecai of the book of Esther. It's a different individual, okay? Because historically it happens different. And then we have the listing. It says, there are the number of the men of the people of Israel.

And it begins to list the sons of the individuals. In verse 36, after listing the sons of not only individuals but also regions, because we find there are also the men of Bethlehem, the men of Nephthema, and we see the regions which they represent.

In verse 36, it tells us that these are the priests. And it begins to list the number of the priests. Verse 40 says, the Levites, the sons of Jeshua and Cadmah, the sons of Hodaviah.

So it begins to list the Levites who return. Verse 43 says, the temple servants and the sons of Zihai. And it begins to list the temple servants. Verse 55 tells us the sons of Solomon's servants.

And it begins to list the sons of Solomon's servants. Verse 58 tells us all the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.

[5 : 03] And now in verse 59, there's a great transition. So we will read this. Now these are those who came from Telmelaha, Telharshah, Cherub, Adan, and Emmer.

By the way, those are Babylonian cities. So these are who came from those regions. But they were not able to give evidence of their father's households and their descendants, whether they were of Israel.

The sons of Deliah, the sons of Tobiah, the sons of Necada, 652. Of the sons of the priests, the sons of Hebiah, the sons of Hekaz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife from the daughters of Barzillai, the Galidite, and he was called by their name.

They searched among their ancestral registration, but they could not be located. Therefore, they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood. The governor said to them that they should not eat from the most holy things until the priest stood up with Urim and Thummim.

The whole assembly numbered 42,360, beside their male and female servants, who numbered 7,337. And they had 200 singing men and women.

[6 : 10] Their horses were 736, their mules 245, their camels 435, and their donkeys 6,720. Some of the heads of the father's 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.

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.

Now the priest 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. So we notice here that numbering and the counting is 42,360, which, by the way, is the same number that Nehemiah gives us in the book of Nehemiah chapter 7.

I will go ahead and tell you that if you are so compelled and you do the math and you begin to add up these numbers, it will not add up to 42,000. If you add up all the numbers that are connected to the names, I believe it, I haven't done it, I've read this, okay, so I'm not the guy who just did all the addition.

But I believe that if you were to add it up, it's somewhere around 22,000 to 23,000 individuals that are listed, at least a counting of it. So we say, well, why does it say there are 42,000?

[7 : 24] Because what we're giving is just a sampling of those who came back. And this is kind of the inclusion of people. We will understand it just like the going into Babylonian captivity did not happen all at once.

When Nebuchadnezzar came in, there were the first deportation. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego went out with that. We know that later on there was another deportation. And then we know that later on there was another deportation.

And so there were people being moved out of Jerusalem until they finally got to the point where the poorest of the poor were the only ones left just to keep the wild beast out of the ramshackle city, of which when Jeremiah was left behind then too.

So we know that when Jerusalem was besieged and eventually fell, that the people were not moved immediately. And the understanding is more than likely they did not come back all at once either.

So they came back in waves. And what Ezra is writing for us, and Nehemiah finds recorded later, is he is giving us a picture of the people who were returning.

[8 : 24] So what does it look like to return from Babylon? Babylon is that place of discipline, that place where God is refining his people. It is one of those great historical markers when we are kind of reading the history of the nation of Israel.

So we begin that reading of the nation of Israel with the call of Abram from the land of Ur of the Chaldeans. So when Abram is called, and he is called to go to a land that the Lord would show him. He has this holdover in Haran, and he stays there until his father dies, and then he eventually makes his way into the promised land. And his name is changed to Abraham. We understand that, and God raises up a nation. And then the next marker will be during the time of Samuel, and we see

that they finally asked for a king.

We know that a lot happens between them, but we know they're in the Exodus wilderness. That happens when Abraham is told that, so they're in captivity. There's the deliverance through Moses. But then Samuel comes, and we begin to mark these covenantal promises that flow from the kings that are there, David being the primary one.

But we are always looking to the Babylonian captivity, and then we're looking after the Babylonian captivity. Because God refines his people, much like when he called the people of Israel out of Exodus.

[9 : 37] It took him a moment. We talk about this thing called instant salvation and progressive sanctification, right? In a moment, he freed them from enslavement. But it took 40 years of wilderness wandering to get Egypt out of his people.

He got his people out of Egypt in a moment when they crossed the Red Sea. But for 40 years, they wandered around in the wilderness until he was able to get Egypt out of their hearts. And they were no longer longing to go back.

As a matter of fact, that generation had to pass away. So what we've seen, he brought them out to bring them in, but they weren't prepared to be brought in until they were free from that which they used to be.

Babylonian captivity is the same way. They went into it as an act of discipline. God is trying to correct a major problem they have. That problem is they are not keeping the covenant.

That problem is they are a very polytheistic, idolatrous people group. Yes, the people that God has redeemed, given so many promises to, are a polytheistic, idolatrous people group.

[10 : 36] And God wants to refine them. Why is God exerting so much energy upon this people group? Well, the answer to that is because there is the covenant promises.

And it is the promise of the coming seed that would deliver all men. God does not divert or nor divulge from his plans and promises. He is going to bring about what he declared he will bring about.

And the Messiah is coming through these people. And so the Babylonian captivity is not a place of destruction. It's a place of refinement. And now when they come back, only a minority, a small minority of those people come back.

And it are those people that God brings back and moves back that he will carry forward his promises. Now, we know, and we'll see it in just a moment, we need to be thankful for those who stayed back.

We need to be thankful for God's sovereignty, how he used that for his glory. That's how, that's why we ended up historically with a thing called the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament.

[11 : 43] It's because there were so many Jewish people of descent who could not speak Hebrew because they were dispersed among the people of the land. And they spoke Greek. They had to translate their scripture, the Old Testament Hebrew, into the Greek so that the people could understand it.

We have to be thankful for that for it was the Septuagint reconciled with the Hebrew scripture that led to the English translation. And because all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes, right?

God even uses the people who did not go back as a means so that we could have the declaration of the word of God. It is more than likely the schools of Ezra that did the Septuagint translation for Ezra was schooled in those ways and rose up scribes around him.

But what I want to focus on are those people who did come back. What does it look like to come back from Babylon? What does it look like to be the people who have been refined and now God is going to carry his purposes forward through them?

And we need to understand that because this kind of is the springboard for the rest of interpreting the book of Ezra. If we've ever went into a time of refinement and we say that the Lord has kind of called us to the woodshed, so to say, and he is bringing us to a point of calling us near himself and refining us to be used by him for his glory and his glory alone.

[13 : 05] Then we've all had our Babylonians and God wants to use us for his purposes. And what does it look like to be those people? Does not mean we're going to be perfect. We'll see that as we studied the book of Ezra, but it does mean there are some some peculiarities about these people.

And that's what I want to focus on tonight before we get into the business meeting. The first thing you notice is these are people with a calling. These are people with a calling and we can't repeat that enough that refrain. And I know we looked at it last Wednesday night when we looked at Ezra chapter one.

But you understand this, that those who went back were those don't miss that from Ezra one, whose heart was stirred by the Lord to return. The reason we see such a small minority of the people return is because they are the people whose heart were stirred.

We can get discouraged and we can kind of be upset that so many people stayed behind. But notice what scripture said.

Now, these are the people. You can't really get past that phrase because he's going to introduce to us those people whom he has called. These were people that chose.

[14:14] No, the scripture is clear. These are the people whose heart was stirred. And the one who stirred their hearts, it tells us, was the Lord God Almighty. So these are those whose God stirred their hearts.

And God knows them by name. He lists their names for us here and gives us the regions that they came from and the regions they were going to. These were people that were dispersed among the Babylonian Empire, which had been taken in by the Persians.

And now they are called to return back to Jerusalem. And God does not forget nor fail to acknowledge those whom he has called. These are the people that God has called to come back and rebuild that temple.

These are the people that are doing so much more than just rebuilding a temple because it will also be the very people that Nehemiah hears about in which they rebuild the city. And it is the very city. And it is the foundation or the footprint of the very temple where our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ would walk into.

It is the very gates that he will go through when they shout out, Hosanna in the highest. Bless is he who comes in the name of the Lord. It is the very place of promise where it says, In the mount of the Lord it will be provided.

[15:20] Don't miss that. When Abraham offered up his son Isaac upon the altar, it was on Temple Mount. When David purchased the threshing floor of Arunah the Jebusite, it was Temple Mount, which was the same place that Arunah had offered, that is the same place that Abraham had offered up his son Isaac, in which Abraham said, In the mount of the Lord it will be provided.

And on that same mountain when David purchased it, David said, This is the house of God. So that is Temple Mount. And it is that place that the sacrifice for sin will be provided that we know is Jesus Christ.

And that had to be established. God is bringing about his purposes for his glory. But he does it through these people. These people who he knows the names and he records them of.

These people whose hearts were stirred. And we think to ourselves, Well, why wouldn't they go back? With a greater question. I know we asked it last time we were together last Wednesday night, but why would they?

They were living in ease and comfort. They were living in a secure region. They were living in prosperity. prosperity. Ezekiel prophesied that they should pray for the prosperity of the nation that held them captive.

[16:33] That they should plant gardens and build houses and live securely in the land. And from all accounts, they were just doing that. They were doing it enough that the overwhelming majority of the Israelite people did not leave.

Because to leave was to sacrifice. To leave was to say, I'm leaving this place of comfort and going to a place of desolation. Remember when Nehemiah heard about Jerusalem?

And the walls laid in disrepair and in ruin. And the gates were still charred by fire. And people had no houses to live in. And there was no security. And there were marooning bands all throughout the land.

We'll see that. It was to put themselves in a place of discomfort and uncertainty. They were not living independently. They were still choosing to live in an uncomfortable region under the rule of the Persians.

Because notice what it says. These are the people of the province. This does not say these are the people of the nation of Israel. They are still considered to be of the province of that land of the Persian Empire. So don't lose sight of the reality that God brings his purposes about through

particular people.

[17 : 41] And he counts them for us. Now in this people group we see a listing, a varying listing of individuals. We meet the men from a certain region. And the reason we kind of read those headings is because we also meet priests, Levites, temple servants, gatekeepers, and Solomon servants.

There are a number of differing people represented here. We have people not only from different geographic regions. We also have people of different economic standing.

Have you ever wondered why the number of people who return can be so large, but the number of burden-bearing beasts be so small? You have 42,000 plus people come back.

But it tells us it even counts the number of horses 736 and their mules 245. It's because the majority of them could not afford an animal to carry their supplies, so they carried it on their back.

But some of them were wealthy enough, and we know that because when they get there, they give money. Some of them had to sell everything and had to get rid of everything just to go. But we meet people not only of varying occupations and varying geographic regions, but we also see here that God has called people of varying economic situations.

[18 : 56] That is, God calls people of differing circumstances to do one united work. It looks a whole lot like a church, really, when we think about it. That God is uniting these people for His glory for one purpose.

And when God calls them to return from Babylon to be the people that He's going to carry His purposes through, He is not a respecter of individuals, but rather He calls these individuals.

Don't ever, ever overlook the reality. And I do this sometimes, I'll just be honest with you. In Scripture, the corporate body is so important.

He is a Savior of the world. He is the Savior of the world, but He is personally your Savior and my Savior as well when we accept Him. But the word personal Savior never appears in Scripture.

It is, He is the Savior. He is the Savior. But the one thing in looking at the corporate identity of the people of God that we fail at times to notice is that God uses these individuals.

[20 : 10] And so we stand amazed that there are individuals that God calls to return because these are the people He wants to build this temple from.

Zerubbabel, by the way, is a descendant of David. We see that we have the right people at the right time. Secondly, we notice here that these are people with a connection.

We kind of miss this if we're not careful. And this is why we read it when we get down to verse 59.

Because in this people group, by the way, I don't know if you've ever noticed this in Scripture.

It happens all throughout Scripture. It happens when we leave Exodus. It happens here when we're leaving Babylon. It happens when Christ is ministering. There's always what we refer to as the mixed multitude.

That is, the people who don't really belong there, but they're there anyway. You remember when they left Egypt, right? When Moses led them out of Egypt and they plundered the Egyptians and they left, some of the Egyptians went with them.

[21 : 07] It was the mixed multitude. It was the people who said, you know what? There's been ten plagues. Y'all's God is a pretty mighty God. We're going to follow Him. But be careful about that because they say, oh, great, the family of God is growing.

Well, not really. It's the people who see the benefits of tagging along, and they want to take part in that. Because as Moses quickly discovered, the mixed multitude is usually the ones who cause the problems first. So we understand that.

But now here, all of a sudden, we have the mixed multitude who comes back with them as well.

Because we have this listing of genealogies, this listing of individuals of the family, the sons of, the sons of, the sons of, the sons of.

And to us, it's boresome. And to us, it kind of seems a little cumbersome to read them. But to them, it was of utmost importance because to be the son of underscored your connection to.

Because there were a group who came with them who could not prove their genealogical enrollment. There were a group of people who said, well, we're going to go back as well. But when they got there, they could not declare who their fathers were.

[22 : 10] And even a group of priests that had to be told they could not serve as priests because they could not declare who their fathers were. And we are told that the leader, the governor of that area, tells them that they cannot serve until someone arrives with Urim and Thummim.

Now, Urim and Thummim are kind of like dice. We understand it's something that when Aaron was anointed to be the priest, it was declared to be the casting of Urim and Thummim so that we would understand what the will of God was.

We don't see that anymore. Once we get to Solomon's reign, it seems to have disappeared, more than likely because the throne kind of has the power to say that at that time. But we don't see it happening anymore.

And we don't really know if this ever happens. But we are told that the governor says, you're just going to have to wait until someone can tell us whether or not you are of right heritage. So because of that, until now, you are unclean.

And we have this people group who came with them who cannot validate that they have a right to be there. Why? Because connections matter in the family of God. Every promise of God was connected to a covenantal promise.

[23 : 19] And the work of God that was going on was directly tied to the promise that God had given to Abraham and to David. And if you could not validate that you are connected to that covenant, if your genealogical enrollment could not be declared and displayed, much like when Nehemiah shows up and wants to rebuild the walls, you remember, and by the way, Nehemiah is another good book, and I love this one.

Tobiah and Sambalot say they want to help, and they call him out to the Valley of Ono. I love that, by the way, because Ono don't go to the Valley of Ono. Nehemiah says we're doing a great work, and we don't have time to come, and you have no part in this.

They say, oh, well, we want to help you. Well, you can't do it because you're not part of us, because your connections matter. And if you could not show, for us, scripturally, these connections matter because it is through these connections that we trace the genealogy of Jesus Christ.

Application-wise, the connection matters because God's promises are only to those who are his people. Now, we find that connection through Jesus Christ when we are adopted into the family through the shed blood of the Lamb.

And through the spirit of adoption, we cry out, Abba, Father. And we have a right to be there. We don't point back to a paper trail of who we were, the son of or the son of.

[24 : 51] We point back to the adoption that we have in Christ. And therefore, every covenant God has made, Paul tells us in the book of Romans, we've been grafted in. We, the wild olive branches, have been grafted into the native olive tree.

And now the promises of Christ, the promises of God, are yes, in Jesus Christ. We belong there. Right? Because without those essential connections, without being able to declare, I have a birthright at stake, then we're unclean.

We're not fit. We're excluded from being used at that time. But we see those that God calls to come out of Babylon are also those who declare, I do belong here.

We have that in Christ. We understand that because of that, we are part of his family. Finally, we see not only calling and connections, we see commitment. We see commitment because it tells us that when they came, the whole assembly is numbered.

And in verse 68 says, some of the heads of the father's households, when they arrived at the house of the Lord, which was in Jerusalem, offered willingly for the house of God to restore it on its foundation. Somewhere around a four-month journey to get there.

[26 : 04] And if you remember from Ezra chapter one, not all went, but all were called to take part somehow. Those who didn't go gave willingly and sacrificially to those who were going so that they could give to the temple rebuilding program.

But what we notice is not only did those say, well, I've been called to come, I've also been called to contribute. So they made the trip and when they got there, the very first thing they did is they gave a free will offering.

It tells us according to their ability, they gave. Not everyone could, but these who could had the ability and they were there. Now they've just went into a city that the houses are decimated, the walls are torn down and they're going to have to rebuild everything.

But the first thing they do when they get there is to give an offering for the reconstruction of the temple. And that is the journey there didn't distract them from the commitment that they had made.

They didn't lose focus of the reality that the reason we're going is not just so we can go be back home. Remember the decree of King Cyrus. Whosoever of God's people that he moves, let him go back and rebuild the temple.

[27 : 12] There was a purpose for their calling and the purpose was that they would reconstruct the temple and they stayed committed to that purpose that when they got there, they gave as they could according to their ability.

And they gave sacrificially. They lived in their cities, it tells us, but here's the sad news that we will get to. They will lay the foundation and after laying the foundation, they will get discouraged because commitment wanes in the face of adversity.

It will get difficult. It will get hard. And the commitment they had, they said, well, it's taken us a long time to get here, but we don't want to lose focus of why we came. It doesn't take very long that after they get there and they begin the construction process that they begin to wane in that commitment and they fall short.

They fall woefully short. They build really nice houses and neglect the temple. So they went from being committed to let's build the temple to well, now that we're not doing that, let's build our houses.

Let's make ourselves at home. It is then that God sends the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. It is there that they get the rebuke from the Lord because they had faltered in their commitments.

[28 : 19] But when they got there, God calls people to return from Babylon through the calling, their connections, and their commitments. And when we fail in any of those, he corrects us through the prophetic teaching of his word.

But we see here when God is going to move forward with his purposes and plans, these are the people he's going to use. And as long as they stay focused on that, he will use them in a mighty way.

We'll see that as we make our way through the book of Ezra. But don't lose sight of the reality that God uses people to do his work for his glory. And when it becomes more about their comfort and their glory and their paneled houses, that's when we get in trouble.

But these were the people hopefully you'll notice, and I'm wrapping up, that it is the book of Haggai that says, you live in your paneled houses while the house of the Lord lays in ruins.

Hopefully you'll notice that that admonition is declared to these people God called, not to the people living in paneled houses back in Babylon.

[29 : 31] He's not correcting the people who did not leave, He's correcting the people who did leave. Because these are the people that He says, I want to use you to fulfill my purposes for my glory, not for your comfort.

As they return from Babylon. Thank you, brothers. Thank you, brothers.