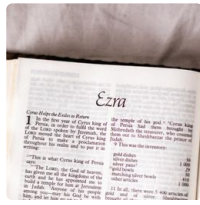


# OpenTheo

## Ezra 1 - 3



### Ezra - Steve Gregg

In this study of the book of Ezra, Steve Gregg begins by tracing the history of the Jewish captivity in Babylon and its eventual release by Cyrus, king of Persia. He notes that Ezra, a priest and likely author of the book, saw the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem as the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. Gregg also explores the controversy over the identity of Shechbaazur and the loss of genealogical records, which led to difficulty in determining tribal affiliations for some returnees. Finally, he discusses the construction of the altar and temple, including the hiring of workers and the provision of cedar from Lebanon.

## Transcript

Today we are beginning to study the book of Ezra. There are only three remaining historical books for us to consider, and they belong to a period considerably later than the last of the historical books that we have already considered, because we had a continuous historical coverage from the time of Joshua, actually the death of Moses, through the period of the conquest and the judges. We've had the appointment of the first kings of Israel, Saul, David, and Solomon, and then we had the division of the empire, of the kingdom I should say.

It was an empire under David and Solomon, but it divided up into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, and we followed their respective histories, bouncing back and forth, looking at those two histories in parallel to each other. That took us through the books of Kings and Chronicles. Of course, Second Chronicles more or less paralleling the books of Kings.

The book of Second Chronicles, the last of the historical books we've considered, ends with the same words that open the book of Ezra. So, it's very clear that Ezra is seen as a sequel to it. The book of Second Chronicles ends with the giving of the decree, although in a shortened form, that Cyrus gave.

You can see in Second Chronicles 36, 22 and 23, it says, Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia. Now, this has jumped a great distance from the fall of Jerusalem, which was the main subject of the end of the books of Kings and Chronicles. Judah and

Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar in the year 586 BC, and the temple was burned down, the city was destroyed.

Most of the Jews, almost all of them, were deported to Babylon and the regions that Babylon controlled. And only the poorest of the land were left in the land of Israel. And for 70 years, Jeremiah said, they would be under the control of the Babylonians.

And we read here, at the end of that period, the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, who conquered the Babylonians, the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, the king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all the kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth, the Lord God, that is Yahweh, God of heaven has given me, and he has commanded me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of his people? May Yahweh, his God, be with him, and let him go up.

And so ends 2 Chronicles, and also so begins Ezra, because we see at the opening verse of Ezra, it says, Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, and then we have that decree again, only a longer version. And at the end of Chronicles, it's only really a single verse, whereas it's actually three verses in Ezra, so it seems that Chronicles has given a summary, an abbreviated form of Cyrus' decree. Now Ezra begins with it so that he picks up where the other book left off.

It is often believed that Ezra is the author of not only the book of Ezra, but also the books of Chronicles. So we are now at the end of the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah had said that this would last 70 years.

Where did he say that? Well, that was in Jeremiah chapter 25, and this is one of the remarkable prophecies of the Bible, because Jeremiah predicted the actual length of time that the Jews would be captive in Babylon, and he was right about the length of time, and he said that Babylon would be destroyed at that time. Well, in Jeremiah's day, there wasn't much evidence of that. Jeremiah certainly didn't live to see that happen.

But in Jeremiah chapter 25, verse 12, it says that it will come to pass when 70 years are completed that I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, says the Lord, and I will make it a perpetual desolation. Now, that's what happened. Cyrus was the Persian leader who came and conquered Babylon, and the kingdom fell, and it was he who then gave the decree that the Jews and, by the way, other captive peoples too, although the Bible doesn't speak about that because it's concerned about the fate of the Jews, but Cyrus actually allowed many different nationalities to return to their lands and rebuild their cities.

That was just his policy, but it happened, as Jeremiah predicted, after 70 years of captivity. Now, how does one calculate those 70 years? That's not the easiest thing in the world to do because there were three phases of deportation in different years that we could see as the beginning of the Babylonian exile. In 605 BC, that's when Nebuchadnezzar took the noble and high-born Jews away into captivity, but not in a very hostile takeover.

He actually treated them well. This apparently happened without a fight. He just came down to Judah and Jehoiachin surrendered to him whatever he wanted, and he simply took some captives back to Babylon.

That was 605. One could, if you wish, begin to count the Babylonian exile from then, when some of the first exiles were taken away. Those included, of course, Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

They were taken away in 605 BC. Then there was another time Nebuchadnezzar came, and he took a lot more, including King Jehoiachin, into captivity, and that was in 597 BC. That certainly could be seen as a beginning of the exile because more people, a more significant amount, including the king, were taken away.

Or one could take 586 BC, when all the Jews, with the exception of a very small remnant of very poor people, were taken away into captivity, and the temple was destroyed in 586. Now, if you would begin the 70 years at 605 BC, or at 597 BC, or at 586 BC, you would, of course, come to different ending points. One of the most significant ways to calculate the 70 years is by the fact that the temple was destroyed in 586 BC, and the new temple was built and completed in 516 or 515 BC, just 70 years later.

And so the temple was actually desolate, and one could argue that Judah's captivity would be defined in terms of their inability to worship God in Jerusalem. And that temple was burned down and was not rebuilt until 70 years later. It was really just about exactly 70 years.

There are other ways to calculate. You could start with 605 BC and figure out in 539 BC, when people began to return, you've got about 65 or so years there, not quite exactly 70, but close enough that one might argue that if it's over 65, one could round it off to 70. But there is, of course, the exact 70 between the burning of the temple and the rebuilding of the temple, and that is possibly how Jeremiah was viewing it.

It doesn't matter too much right now. Ezra and Nehemiah and Esther are all books of our Bible that were written at the end of that period. They are the three post-exilic books, as it's usually said, whereas all the other historical books of the Bible are pre-exilic.

That is Old Testament history books. They're all pre-exilic. Exilic means having to do with the exile of the Jews in Babylon.

So before the exile, Genesis through 2 Chronicles are pre-exilic, and only three books are post-exilic of the history books, and that's these ones. There are also three post-exilic prophets. Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi are three post-exilic prophets, two of them prophesied during the time that we read about in Ezra.

So we have a period of time after the captivity where God is restoring the people, and as I said, there were three deportations at the beginning of the period. There are actually three phases of return as well. The earliest is that which we find the subject of the first six chapters of Ezra.

That was when a group of Jews went back to Jerusalem from Babylon from the decree of Cyrus that permitted them to do so. They were led by a man named Zerubbabel, who was a grandson of King Jehoiakim, and therefore he was of the David's line. He was the natural, legitimate leader of the people, but he was not made king.

He would have been the Davidic king by genealogical qualifications, but because they were a vassal under Persia at this time, he was not given the status of king, only governor. He was the governor of the people, Zerubbabel. And then there was a high priest at the time who was called Joshua or Jeshua.

These are just different forms of the same name. In the book of Zechariah, he is called Joshua. In the book of Ezra, he is called Jeshua.

But Jeshua and Zerubbabel were the two leaders. The civil leader, the governor, Zerubbabel, and the religious leader, the high priest, Jeshua, were the main leaders of this first return. And only about 50,000 Jewish families came back from Babylon at that time.

And that was just the beginning. That was in 538 BC. Later, Ezra himself came from Persia and returned to Jerusalem, and that was yet a second return.

That was in 458 BC. And then later still, Nehemiah and a few others came back from Persia to Jerusalem, and that was probably about 544 BC. So in three different waves, Jews returned, just as in three different waves they were deported.

And that means that if you take the beginning and ending dates different, you can calculate different lengths of time that Jews were in Babylon. Essentially, the 70-year prediction seems to be fulfilled in the length of time the temple was down. Now, these post-exilic books, Ezra and Nehemiah were considered by the Jews in the Hebrew scriptures to be one book, just as our books of Chronicles were one book, our books of Kings were one book, our books of Samuel were one book.

In the Hebrew scriptures, Ezra and Nehemiah were originally treated as one book, but the two were divided, as in the other cases of those other books, at the time the Septuagint was translated into Greek. The Septuagint, however, also contained other

books besides the biblical books, including an apocryphal book of Ezra, so that our book of Ezra was called Second Ezra in the Septuagint, because the apocryphal book of Ezra was called First Ezra, or Esdras in the Greek. If you get the Septuagint, you'll find First and Second Esdras.

The second of these is our book of Ezra. The first of them is an apocryphal book that is not considered part of the inspired scripture. The Hebrew Bible continued, after even the Septuagint was translated, the Hebrew Bible still treated these as one book until modern times, until about 1448, and then the Hebrew Bible itself began to treat Ezra and Nehemiah as two books.

It is actually believed that Ezra wrote both of them. Now, Nehemiah has some first-person reminiscences from the man Nehemiah, but it is thought that Nehemiah's journals or Nehemiah's reminiscences were collected by Ezra when he put together both the books of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, these books. So, all these books are believed to be post-exilic books written by Ezra.

Now, the time of the book of Ezra, not including Nehemiah, there are two different time periods in the book, and there's a division between chapter 6 and chapter 7. The first six chapters belong to one period of time, and then chapters 7 through 10 belong to the other period of time, and there's about almost 60 years in between them during which no information is really given in the book of Ezra. But we do have information about that 60-year period between them in the book of Esther, because the reign of Xerxes, or Ahasuerus as he's called in the Old Testament, his reign took place in that 60-year period that falls between Ezra chapter 6 and Ezra chapter 7. And so the book of Esther and its story is actually chronologically in the middle of this book. But we'll treat it separately, obviously, after we've gone through this book.

But in the first of these sections, that's the first wave of people returning from Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua. This period covers about 20 or 22 years, it starts in 538 B.C., and that's when the Decree of Cyrus is made. But it's probably not until about 537 or 536 B.C. that the exiles actually get there.

So their journey could have taken as much as a year. A lot of them had to travel 800 miles on foot, and it would at least take many months. So though the Decree of Cyrus is in 538 B.C. and the book begins by recording that decree, it passes over the travel time of the people and just begins with them setting up the altar and so forth, which was really around 536 B.C. And so from 536 B.C. for 20 years to 516 B.C. when the temple was built, that's the first period covered in those first six chapters.

That spans the reigns of three Persian kings, and they sometimes figure into the story because there are people who are trying to oppose the Jews rebuilding the temple, and they appeal by letters to the kings of Persia. And so we'll read about different kings of Persia at different points in the story. Now after that 20 or 22-year period, there is the

gap, about 58 years, during which the book of Esther takes place, but we will not concern ourselves with that yet.

And at the end of that, we come to chapter 7, after that gap. And chapter 7 through 10 covers a period of maybe one or two years. It's just a very brief period of time.

And it's the time when Ezra returns to Jerusalem, and he comes there mainly to do some reforms. He comes there to reestablish order in the religion, and the worship of the community in Jerusalem, who have come back from Babylon, but have done some compromising and so forth. And he comes to clean up their religious worship and to do some reforming.

He came in 458 BC, and that was during the reign of Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes reigned from 464 to 424. I've got that in your notes.

You don't need to know that. But it was during that 40-year reign of Artaxerxes in the midst of that that Ezra came back to Jerusalem. So there's this gap of 58 years in between.

During that time, Xerxes was reigning in Persia. He reigned from 485 to 465 BC, 20 years, and he was, of course, Ezra's husband. She was his queen.

So from the beginning of Ezra to the end of Ezra, including that 58-year gap in the middle, it covers about 80 years total of history. As for the authorship, traditionally the Jews believe Ezra is the author. At least in chapters 8 and 9, the author speaks in the first person as Ezra.

He says, I did this, and I heard that, and so forth, and I responded this way. So Ezra does identify himself at least as the author of those chapters. In other places, it appears that it's written in the third person, and Ezra is not speaking of himself, but his book is obviously a compilation of other works because a lot of what he writes happened before he was born.

Everything in chapters 1 through 6 happened 60 years before he himself came to Jerusalem, so he had to depend on other sources, just as in the case of writing the books of Chronicles. He would have to depend on earlier written sources. In this case, the book of Ezra, approximately half of it is made up of documents that he probably had in writing, which he collected to make this book.

There are letters of correspondence between the kings of Persia and other parties, and that whole correspondence, of course, would be something Ezra would simply get a hold of in writing and include it in the book and insert it. He didn't write those parts. He just included them.

There are also many elaborate lists, the names of the families that return. Chapter 2 of

Ezra has this long list. Obviously, he's not doing that from memory or from direct revelation.

He's got some kind of sources for that information. Likewise, there's lists of other things, the lists of people who entered into unlawful marriages and had to break them up. There's the lists of the items that have been taken from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar that were restored and the numbers of them and so forth.

These lists, Ezra seems to be a man who liked details like this. He was a priest, by the way, and we see a priestly cast to these books that he wrote. Even the books of Chronicles have much more of a priestly interest in them than the books of Kings and Samuel, which parallel them.

Because the writer of Chronicles is giving a lot of detail about how the singers in the temple were arranged and who the gatekeepers were and a lot of the detail of temple ritual that would be interesting to a priest and not so interesting to other people are included in Chronicles. And you see the same interest in the book of Ezra in priestly concerns and Levitical concerns because Ezra is a priest and he's writing from the point of view of a priest. Now, most Old Testament books are written entirely in Hebrew.

There's only two exceptions. One is Ezra and one is Daniel. Both of these books have sections that are in Hebrew and sections that are not.

In the case of the book of Daniel, which has 12 chapters, six of them are written in Aramaic and six in Hebrew. Daniel is about half and half Hebrew and Aramaic. Ezra is almost entirely in Hebrew, but there are sections, especially the correspondence that he records of the Persian kings that are given to us in Aramaic.

And that is no doubt because he simply had those letters in their original language and he just copied them without translating them into his book. So, chapter 4, verse 8 through chapter 6, verse 18 is one of the sections that is in Aramaic in the original rather than Hebrew. That's chapter 4, verse 8 through chapter 6, verse 18.

The other section that's in Aramaic is chapter 7, verses 12 through 26. Now, there is controversy about the actual order of events chronologically. Some scholars believe that Ezra came after Nehemiah rather than before.

And there are arguments that scholars use for these kinds of things, but it remains an unsettled matter. It's a matter of controversy among scholars whether the order that we have them in in our biblical arrangement is the correct order or whether that should be altered. There really is no reason that would compel us to deviate from the biblical canonical arrangement.

So, we're going to assume that if for some reason it turned out we were wrong and Nehemiah came earlier than Ezra or whatever, I don't know that we've lost anything by

not knowing that. I think we can pretty much trust the arrangement. It's a very ancient arrangement in the Hebrew Bible.

And so, it is likely to be correct, and if it's not correct, there's not much at stake. But just know that there is some controversy about that among scholars. Okay, and so having said that, we're going to just look now at the material in Ezra.

And as I pointed out, he began the same way he closed the book of 2 Chronicles with the recording of the decree of Cyrus. And he says that this decree says, Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, king of Persia. Now, Josephus says that Cyrus was influenced in this decree by having been shown the book of Isaiah.

Now, Ezra says it's so that Jeremiah's prophecy would be fulfilled. And he's talking, of course, about Jeremiah's prediction that there would be a 70-year captivity in Babylon. And that came true.

But it's even more remarkable that Isaiah had predicted Cyrus and even had named him more than 150 years before he really did anything, before he conquered Babylon. In Isaiah chapter 44, Isaiah predicts the Babylonian exile. He also predicts that Cyrus will be the one who will allow the Jews to go back and rebuild the temple.

And it's in poetic language, but it leaves very little to the imagination. In Isaiah 44, 27, or 26, let's say, that God is the one who confirms the word of his servant and performs the counsel of his messengers, who says to Jerusalem, you shall be inhabited. To the cities of Judah, you shall be built.

And I will raise up her waste places. Who says to the deep, be dry. And I will dry up your rivers.

Who says of Cyrus, he is my shepherd. And he shall perform all my pleasure. Even saying to Jerusalem, you shall be built.

And to the temple, your foundation shall be laid. Chapter 45, thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held to subdue nations before him, and to loose the armor of kings, and to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut. And so forth.

Now, Cyrus is mentioned by name in these places, and Isaiah lived, you know, it was like 150 years before Cyrus was born. And it was 200 years before he actually conquered Babylon that this was uttered. This, of course, has led skeptics to suggest that maybe Isaiah didn't really write these verses, because, frankly, Isaiah didn't live late enough to know about Cyrus.

And skeptics do not believe in divine inspiration, so they can't imagine that anyone living



in Isaiah's day, seven centuries before Christ, would be able to name Cyrus and the things he would do. However, those who believe in divine inspiration realize that this is not even the first time this has happened, because an unnamed prophet in 1 Kings chapter 12 prophesied that Josiah would come and destroy an altar in Bethel, and Josiah had not been born, and would not be born for a couple hundred more years either. So, God has already, even once before this case, named a man and said what he would do before he was born by a couple centuries.

So, Isaiah has done with Cyrus. Now, what it says of Cyrus here in Isaiah is in the midst of this prophecy about him, in verse 27 and 44, Isaiah 44, 27, it says, he says to the deep, be dry and I will dry up your rivers. Cyrus conquered Babylon by drying up the river bed, Euphrates, that went under the wall, and therefore instead of having to scale or break down the wall of Babylon, he was able to go under it.

And he did so by drying up, he redirected the Euphrates so that the river bed dried up at the point where it went under the walls of Babylon, and then he marched his armies through in the river bed. Now, actually the river bed was known, the Babylonians knew this could be a point of vulnerability for them to attack, and so they had placed bronze gates in the river bed so that persons could not do what Cyrus did. However, those gates happened to be opened when Cyrus came through.

Now, secular historians suggest that this is because there were persons in Babylon collaborating with Cyrus who opened the gates. Maybe the people in Babylon were not happy with Belshazzar who was ruling them drunkenly, and they wanted Cyrus to come in, and so they opened the gates. We don't know if that's the case or not.

It would still fulfill the prophecy, even if it was done very naturally. If people were on Cyrus' side and opened those gates, or maybe God opened them, we don't know. But we do read this in Isaiah 45, verse 1, he says that God would open before him the double doors so that the gates will not be shut.

And he mentions in verse 2, the gates of bronze, I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron. So, there is a prediction that there will be an opening of these bronze gates, a removal of this obstacle. The river will be dried up.

Cyrus will come in and will conquer Babylon and will give permission to the Jews to go back to their land. It's interesting that Ezra doesn't mention this prophecy, which seems even more remarkable than that of Jeremiah. It may be simply that he didn't want to elaborate more, and the fact that Jeremiah had predicted this was enough to mention.

But, in any case, Cyrus, according to Josephus, was influenced by being shown these verses in Isaiah. Now, he may not have been. Josephus may only be guessing.

We don't know where Josephus got his information. But it is possible that some priest,

after Cyrus conquered Babylon, showed him these verses in Isaiah and said, look, our prophet said that you would do this. And there is some reason to believe this could be true because it says in verse 2, in his decree, he says, thus says Cyrus, king of Persia, all the kingdoms of the earth, Yahweh, God of heaven has given me.

That's what Isaiah said. Yahweh says, I'm giving you all these kingdoms. I'm destroying these kingdoms before you.

And so he might be referring to that prediction. Yahweh, the Lord God of heaven has given me. He doesn't say my Persian gods have given me these victories, as a man might be expected to do.

But he recognizes Yahweh as the one who has sovereignly done that. He says, and he has commanded me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judea, or Judah. Who is there among you of his people? May his God be with him.

Now let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Yahweh, God of Israel. Then he says in parentheses, he is God. Now, for Cyrus to say this, again, it would be more easily explained if he had in fact seen the prophecies of Isaiah and been amazed that a Jewish prophet hundreds of years before his time had named him and said what he would do.

He could easily say, well, Yahweh, he is God. Yahweh is the one who's made me the ruler here. Yahweh has given me a charge to let you people return and build your house.

All of that is in fact found in Isaiah. And so that a pagan king would speak this way about Yahweh and say he is God, the God of Israel. Like, for example, Nebuchadnezzar had done on occasion when impressed by what God showed him through Daniel or through Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And it says in verse 4, And whoever remains in any place where he sojourns, let the men of his place help him with the silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides freewill offerings for the house of God, which is in Jerusalem. Now, Cyrus is saying, anyone who wants to, any Jew who's in my precincts under my jurisdiction is free to go back to Jerusalem if he wishes and build the house of the Lord. I'm doing this in response to a command I've received from Yahweh, who is the true God, the God of Israel.

But he says, if any of you don't go, you don't have to, but you need to financially help. So if you're going to stay where you are and not go back to Jerusalem, then you need to send financial help to your brothers who are going. So Cyrus really paved the way for the temple to be rebuilt, even though he was a pagan.

Verse 5, Then the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites, with all those whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up to build the house of Yahweh, which is in Jerusalem. Now, it mentions the heads of the fathers'

houses of Judah and Benjamin and the Levites and priests. It doesn't mention the other tribes.

Of course, the reason for that is that the Ten Tribes of the North had been destroyed long before the Babylonian exile had begun, at least 50 years before, approximately 50 years before, or more, actually, more than that. 150 years before, excuse me. So some period of time earlier, the northern tribes had been pretty much eliminated from the map.

But some members of those tribes had previously immigrated to the southern kingdom of Judah. But the southern kingdom of Judah was essentially the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. And so they had retained their tribal identities, and the heads of their houses knew what tribes they were of, because they had retained that identity all the way up until the time of the exile.

Whereas persons from the other tribes, some of them had become part of the nation of Judah, and probably some had retained knowledge of their tribal identity, but they'd been mostly merged in the land of Judah. Now, the Levites and priests would be an exception, of course, because the Levites had a special identity, and most of them, no doubt, had already come back down to Judah before the fall of the northern kingdom. The policies of the northern kingdom did not honor the Levites, and therefore they had motivation to go back down to Judah back in the early days after the split into the two kingdoms.

And so the tribe of Judah had Judah and Benjamin and Levites predominantly and distinctly. They had also members of other tribes among them, but perhaps the heads of their families' houses were not, you know, those tribes perhaps had not remained so distinct and identifiable. And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold and goods and livestock and all precious things besides all that was willingly offered.

So that is, the people who didn't go back with them, the Jews around them helped them out financially. King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of Yahweh, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and had put in the temple of his gods. And Cyrus, the king of Persia, brought them out by the hand of Mithradath, the treasurer, and counted them out to Shesh-Bazar, the prince of Judah.

Now, Shesh-Bazar, his identity is a matter of controversy. He is not really mentioned as a character in the story after chapter one. Instead, the governor is said to be Zerubbabel, and that, as early as chapter two, and especially in chapter three, Zerubbabel is mentioned in chapter two, verse two, as the one with whom the exiles returned.

And then, by the time you get to chapter three, Zerubbabel and Joshua are obviously the leaders of the people there. And so, who is this Shesh-Bazar? One theory held by some

of the old commentators, like Matthew Henry, was that Shesh-Bazar was just another name for Zerubbabel. It's possible, because a lot of these characters had more than one name, and Zerubbabel could have had the name Shesh-Bazar as well.

Probably, if so, that would mean Zerubbabel would be his Jewish name and Shesh-Bazar his Persian name, just as Daniel and his companions had both Hebrew and Babylonian names. Actually, Shesh-Bazar would be more of a Babylonian than a Persian name. But most scholars don't agree that this is the same person.

Many of them believe that Shesh-Bazar was a man who was of lesser rank than Zerubbabel, but was entrusted with these goods and given the charge over their safe transit to Jerusalem, but that he didn't have much political authority in the returning community, and Zerubbabel was the man with that authority. Some say that Shesh-Bazar was actually appointed to be the governor prior to Zerubbabel, but didn't last long. He may have died early, or for whatever reason, left office early and Zerubbabel took over his place.

This is something that will never probably be able to be decided unless we get some other documents discovered that have not been discovered that tell us more about Shesh-Bazar. In any case, he is in the picture in chapter 1, but instead of him, we have Zerubbabel as the leader in the other chapters. Now, in verse 9, this is the number of them.

There were 30 gold platters, 1,000 silver platters, 29 knives, 30 gold basins, 410 silver basins of a similar kind, and 1,000 other articles. All the articles of gold and silver were 5,400. All these Shesh-Bazar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.

So he went with them, but he does not seem to be significant in the later story. Now, chapter 2 says, Now these are the people of the province who came back from the captivity of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his own city. Those who came with Zerubbabel were Jeshua, of course the high priest, and the two of them together are mentioned frequently together as the leaders after this, Nehemiah, which was not the Nehemiah after whom the book is named.

At least most scholars do not believe it is that Nehemiah. Sariah, Reahiah, Mordecai. Now Mordecai, of course, is the name of an important character in the book of Esther, but again scholars would not identify this Mordecai with that Mordecai because frankly the time frame doesn't work out well.

And this Mordecai went back to Jerusalem whereas the other Mordecai in the book of Esther was still living in Persia at a later date than this. So almost certainly a different

Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Bayanah.

The number of the men of the people of Israel. And then it breaks them down into smaller groups. And these smaller groups are listed in different ways.

Sometimes they are listed as going with a certain individual whose name is given. Other times they are mentioned by the cities that they are from. And it seems like these two ways of designating them are kind of mixed together.

It says in verse 3, the people of Perosh, 2,172. The people of Shephetiah, 372. The people of Arah, 775.

The people of Pahavmoab, of the people of Joshua and Joab, 2,812. The people of Elam, 1,254. The people of Jatoo, 945.

The people of Zechariah, 760. Now as it goes on, it's sometimes hard to know whether these names are the names of cities or the names of people. And we've already, up to this point, encountered both.

Names like Shephetiah in verse 4 are going to be somebody's name. But a name like Pahavmoab in verse 6 is almost certainly the name of a city, although there are people of Joshua and Joab in that group. So we're going to have the people of X. And X is either going to be a city.

No doubt the people had come, had been deported from that city that is named. Or else it's a person's name, which is either somebody who's the head of that family at the time of the return or perhaps an ancestor of those people. But lots of these names are simply not identifiable.

We don't know whether it's a person's name or a location name, but we just have these numbers associated with them. So verse 10, the people of Bani, 642. The people of Bibi, 623.

The people of Asgad, 1,222. The people of Adonikem, 666. The people of Bigvi, 2,056.

The people of Adin, 454. The people of Eter, of Hezekiah, 98. The people of Dezai, 323.

The people of Jorah, 112. The people of Hashem, 223. The people of Gebar, 95.

The people of Bethlehem, 123. The men of Netepha, 56. The men of Anathoth, 128.

And I just would mention this, that Jeremiah was from Anathoth, originally a priestly city in Judah, and when he was in prison, he was instructed by God to purchase, to redeem a piece of property, purchased from his uncle, I think it was, a piece of property in Anathoth, even though it was going to be overrun and all the people of it were going to be exiles. But God had him purchase the rights to it and the deed to this property as an

act of faith in his own prophecy that the people would come back. So he knew that Anathoth, as well as the rest of Judah, was doomed to go into captivity for 70 years.

And Jeremiah would never see this property. But in purchasing a deed to it, it was his symbolic way of saying, there will be ownership of this property again someday by people of Judah because God will bring them back from Babylon. And so we find that there are people of Anathoth, Jeremiah's city, who are among those that return, 128 of them.

The people of Asmaveth, 42. The people of Kirjeth-Aram, obviously a city, of Jephariah and Beeroth, 743. The people of Ramah and Geba, 621.

The men of Michmah, 122. The men of Bethel and Ai, 223. The people of Nebo, 52.

The people of Magbish, 156. The people of other Elam, there was an Elam earlier, now there's the other Elam, 1,254. The people of Harim, 320.

The people of Lod, Hadad and Ono, 725. The people of Jericho, 345. The people of Senea, 3,630.

Now, that's just the, I guess, the people from various families and towns. Now we get attention to the priests who return. Now the priests, the sons of Jediah, of the house of Jeshua, 973.

The sons of Imer, 1,052. The sons of Pasher, 1,247. The sons of Harim, 1,017.

Lots of priests, really. Almost a disproportionately large number of priests when you think about it. Because a lot of these towns, there were 54 or 122 people coming.

And yet, from just one branch of these priests, there were 1,247. And from another branch, 1,017 and so forth. And 1,052.

So there were thousands of priests coming. Disproportionately represented, probably because they were the ones most zealous and had the most to gain, as it were, by the reestablishment of the temple worship, which was their calling. Also the Levites, which would be related to the priests, but obviously not of the family of Aaron.

The sons of Jeshua and Cadmiel, the sons of Hodahiah, 74. The singers, the sons of Asaph, 128. These sons of Asaph either wrote some of the psalms or had some of the psalms written for them.

They were the singers. The sons of the gatekeepers, the sons of Shalem, the sons of Ather, the sons of Talmud, the sons of Akub, the sons of Hattidah, the sons of Shobai, 139 in all. The Nethanim.

Now, the Nethanim are only mentioned a few times in scripture, but scholars seem to be

agreed that the Nethanim were the people descended from the Gibeonites who entered into that deceptive arrangement with Joshua. Remember when Joshua was conquering the land of Canaan and was forbidden by God to make arrangements with the Canaanites, these people of Gibeon, who were Canaanites, deceived Joshua into thinking they were from somewhere else, not in Canaan, and convinced him to enter into a mutual non-aggressions pact with them so that they wouldn't be wiped out. Only later did Joshua find out that they were people who lived nearby in Canaan and that he should not have made such an agreement, but he honored that agreement.

And it turned out that they were good allies of Israel. And the Nethanim are the descendants of the Gibeonites, according to what most scholars would say. The Nethanim, the sons of Zihah, the sons of Hasufah, the sons of Tabeoth, the sons of Keros, the sons of Siahah, the sons of Padon, the sons of Labanah, the sons of Haggadah, the sons of Akub, the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmal, the sons of Hanan, the sons of Gidel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Riah.

Now, there's going to be a test on this. The sons of Rezan. If not here, then when you stand before the pearly gates, you'll have to answer the details of this list.

The sons of Rezan, the sons of Nekodah, the sons of Gazam, the sons of Uzzah, the sons of Paziah, the sons of Bessai, the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephussim, the sons of Babuk, the sons of Hakufah. I really don't have to read these names except it's good practice. The sons of Harher, the sons of Basluth, the sons of Mehita, the sons of Harsha, the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Tema, the sons of Nezhiah, and the sons of Hatifah.

I hope none were left out of that list. Verse 55. The sons of Solomon's servants, the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sofereth, the sons of Heruda, the sons of Jeala, the sons of Darchon, the sons of Gidel, the sons of Shephethiah, the sons of Hathil, the sons of Pokareth, the sons of Zabim, the sons of Ammi.

All the Nethanim and the children of Solomon's servants were 392. And these were the ones who came up from Telmena, Telharsha, Cherub, Adan, Emer. But they could not identify their father's house or their genealogy, whether they were of Israel.

These people unfortunately had lost the genealogical records and couldn't really tell what tribe they were of. And it says the sons of Deliah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nakoda, 652 in that category, and of the sons of the priests, the sons of Habiah, the sons of Koz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite. So there's another two Barzillais.

Barzillai the Gileadite, of course, was the man who helped David with provisions when he and his loyalists fled from Absalom. And Barzillai was a rich old man who brought them provisions and food. And later David offered him a place at the table in his kingdom.

And Barzillai said, I'm an old man. What do I care about that? And so he was a good guy, a friend of David. And he had a daughter, apparently, or daughters, one of whom married this other guy named Barzillai.

And it says in verse 62, these, the ones, especially the ones that could not prove their lineage by genealogies, it says, these sought their listing among those who were registered by genealogy, but they were not found. Therefore, they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled. You can't have somebody in the priesthood if they're not descended from Aaron.

And they couldn't prove that they were. Some of them apparently were believed to be, but couldn't prove it. So they couldn't be included.

And the governor, which in this case is probably Zerubbabel, not the Shesh Bazar, the governor said to them that they should not eat of the most holy things till a priest could consult with the Urim and the Thummim. Now I'm not sure where they would find the Urim and the Thummim at this late date, but until they had an Urim and Thummim to consult the Lord about things, they couldn't prove their lineage by natural means. They'd have to have a supernatural way that God would prove that they are true priests.

Until that would come along, they couldn't really serve as priests. They couldn't eat the holy things. It says in verse 64, the whole congregation together was 42,360, besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337.

So the total number is just right up pushing against 50,000. It's 42,360 plus 7,337, plus they had 200 men and women singers, so it's just barely under 50,000 people. Their horses were 736, their mules 245, their camels 435, and their donkeys 6,720.

Some of the heads of the fathers' houses, when they came to the house of the Lord, which is in Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to erect it in its place. According to their ability, they gave to the treasury for the work 61,000 gold drachmas, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priestly garments. So the priests and the Levites, some of the people and the singers, the gatekeepers and the Nethanim dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

So they returned all these numbers that came from certain cities. They apparently went back to the cities they came from. Now, the whole region that had been under Babylon subjugated was now under Persian rule, and Cyrus gave them the right to go back and just inhabit and rebuild their old cities.

So there'd be an actual restoration, not only of Jerusalem, but of some of the original towns that these people had come from. They had their work cut out for them, though, because there were nothing but ruins there. And we find that Zerubbabel, who was charged with the rebuilding of the temple and such, was facing a lot of opposition.



Some of that opposition will be focused upon in chapter 4. In chapter 3, it says, And when the seventh month had come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. This is for the purpose of establishing worship again, setting up the altar. Then Jeshua, the son of Jehozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, arose and built the altar of God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.

Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases, and they offered burnt offerings on it to Yahweh, both the morning and the evening burnt offerings. Now, it says fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries. We don't have specifics given in this verse, but we do later on.

Both Zerubbabel and later on Nehemiah had considerable opposition from the local Samaritans. These were the people who were not Jewish, but were the descendants of those who had been brought in by the Babylonians to displace the people of Israel. Some of the Israelites had stayed in the area, the poorest and so forth, they had been intermarried.

These were people who were partially Jewish, but not very much Jewish. They were mostly pagan. Remember in the book of 2 Kings it said that when these pagans were brought into the area, initially their pagan ways so displeased the Lord that he sent lions among them and killed some of them.

So the Persians sent back one of the priests of Israel to teach these people the ways of Yahweh so the lions wouldn't kill them. And so it says they feared Yahweh and served other gods. That's the way these Samaritans were.

They're kind of a half-breed, both racially and religiously. They served Yahweh and other gods, and therefore they weren't really pure Jews. And they gave trouble to the Jews.

They didn't like seeing the Jewish religion reestablished and so forth. And we read here there was some fear, maybe some terrorism had been brought against the Jews in this case, but they nonetheless moved forward. They set up the altar, apparently on the same base that Solomon's altar had set on.

They're in the same location as Solomon's temple, and it's on its proper base. And they began to offer the daily burnt offerings morning and evenings. And it says they also kept the Feast of Tabernacles as it is written, because this was the seventh month, it says in verse 1, so it was time for that.

They kept the Feast of Tabernacles as it is written. They offered the daily burnt offerings in the number required by ordinance for each day. And afterward they offered the regular burnt offering and those for new moons and for all the appointed feasts.

Now the new moons are the first day of each month, and that was treated like a holy day, just like the seventh day of every week was. And all the appointed feasts of the Lord that were consecrated and those of everyone who willingly offered a freewill offering to Yahweh, from the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, but the foundation of the temple had not yet been laid. So they had set up the altar to get that operational, but they still hadn't even begun the building project at all of the temple, not even the foundation yet.

And they gave money to the masons and the carpenters and food and drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa. This is exactly what Solomon had done. He had contracted with the people in Lebanon in his days, of course it was Hiram, the king of Tyre, to provide cedar from this forest of Lebanon, and they would float them as rafts down to Joppa, Israel's seaport, and then they would be disassembled and treated as separate logs and planed and prepared by the Jews.

And so this group of returning exiles also made a contract with the people of Sidon and Tyre to get cedars from them for the building of the temple. Verse 8, Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Joshua the son of Jehoshaddak, and the rest of their brethren and the priests and the Levites and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began to work and appointed the Levites from twenty years old and above to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers, Camil, with his sons and the sons of Judah, arose as one to oversee those working on the house of God, the sons of Henedad with their sons and the brethren of the Levites.

When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with the cymbals to praise Yahweh according to the ordinance of David the king of Israel. And they sang responsibly, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever toward Israel. Then all the people shouted with a great shout, and they praised the Lord because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

Once the foundation was laid, they had reason to believe, the rest of the building would go up successfully too. Actually it was delayed. It was delayed for a long time.

And finally afterward they started up again. I think it was for 16 years it was delayed. And then finally they returned to the project under the encouragement of the prophets Zechariah and Haggai, which we'll read about later on.

But they were happy to see the foundation laid, but not everyone was equally happy. There were mixed reactions. It says in verse 12, But many of the priests and the Levites, the heads of the fathers' houses, who were old men, who had seen the first temple, Solomon's temple, when they saw this, they wept with a loud voice when the foundation

of this temple was laid before their eyes.

Yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people. It must have been a noisy occasion, trumpets and weeping and singing and shouting, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off. Now why did these older men who remembered Solomon's temple weep? There's different opinions about that.

Some think they wept for joy. Others feel they wept for grief, because they could see already that the budget that they had was going to be much less than Solomon's budget. They could remember how beautiful and how ornate Solomon's temple had been, and yet how inferior this one looked like it would be.

It truly was an inferior building when they were finished, because they just didn't have the money Solomon had. They just couldn't match it. We know that Haggai wrote to them during this time, and in Haggai chapter 2, it says in verse 3, the prophet says, Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? Now that's the same people we're reading about who were weeping there at the end of chapter 3. They were the older men, the older priests, who had seen Solomon's temple before it was destroyed.

Now they're seeing this project. And it says, Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? So, in other words, it would appear that Haggai is saying that those who were weeping, who had seen the temple before and now saw the foundation laid here, that they were weeping because it seemed to them like it was like nothing. Like it was nothing compared to Solomon's temple.

And yet Haggai goes on to prophesy that this latter temple will have a greater glory to it than Solomon's temple did. Perhaps a reference to the fact that Christ himself would come to this temple that Zerubbabel built and would teach there and so forth. I mean, the glory of the Lord would fill it in the person of Jesus in a different sense than Solomon's temple was filled.

But we do see the beginnings of the rebuilding of the temple at this point. And in chapter 4, we're going to see the beginnings of opposition to this project, which plagued them all the way through and discouraged them initially until the prophets Zechariah and Haggai encouraged them again and they got back on the project. We'll take a break at this point, though, before we take the other part of this.