

CHAPTER 2

That many returned out of Babylon upon Cyrus's proclamation we were told in the foregoing chapter; we have here a catalogue of the several families that returned (v. 1).

- I. The leaders (v. 2).
- II. The people (v. 3-35).
- III. The priests, Levites, and retainers to the temple (v. 35-63).
- IV. The sum total, with an account of their retinue (v. 64-67).
- V. Their offerings to the service of the temple (v. 68-70).

<SM>EZRA 2:1-35

THE RETURN OF THE CAPTIVES

We may observe here,

1. That an account was kept in writing of the families that came up out of captivity, and the numbers of each family. This was done for their honour, as part of their recompence for their faith and courage, their confidence in God and their affection to their own land, and to stir up others to follow their good example. Those that honour God he will thus honour. The names of all those Israelites indeed that accept the offer of deliverance by Christ shall be found, to their honour, in a more sacred record than this, even in *the Lamb's book of life*. The account that was kept of the families that came up from the captivity was intended also for the benefit of posterity, that they might know from whom they descended and to whom they were allied.

2. That they are called *children of the province*. Judah, which had been an illustrious kingdom, to which other kingdoms had been made provinces, subject to it and dependent on it, was now itself made a province, to receive laws and commissions from the king of Persia and to be accountable to him. See how sin diminishes and debases a nation, which righteousness would exalt. But by thus being made servants (as the

patriarchs by being sojourners in a country which was theirs by promise) they were reminded of the *better country, that is, the heavenly* (^{^{S116}Hebrews 11:16), a *kingdom which cannot be moved*, or changed into a province.}

3. That they are said to come *every one to his city*, that is, the city appointed them, in which appointment an eye, no doubt, was had to their former settlement by Joshua; and to that, as near as might be, they returned: for it does not appear that any others, at least any that were able to oppose them, had possessed them in their absence.

4. That the leaders are first mentioned, v. 2. Zerubbabel and Jeshua were their Moses and Aaron, the former their chief prince, the latter their chief priest. Nehemiah and Mordecai are mentioned here; some think not the same with the famous men we afterwards meet with of those names: probably they were the same, but afterwards returned to court for the service of their country.

5. Some of these several families are named from the persons that were their ancestors, others from the places in which they had formerly resided; as with us many surnames are the proper names of persons, others of places.

6. Some little difference there is between the numbers of some of the families here and in Nehemiah 7, where this catalogue is repeated, which might arise from this, that some who had given in their names at first to come afterwards drew back — said, *I go, Sir, but went not*, which would lessen the number of the families they belonged to; others that declined, at first, *afterwards repented and went*, and so increased the number.

7. Here are two families that are called *the children of Elam* (one 5:7, another 5:31), and, which is strange, the number of both is the same, 1254.

8. The children of Adonikam, which signifies *a high lord*, were 666, just the *number of the beast* (^{^{R18}Revelation 13:18), which is there said to be *the number of a man*, which, Mr. Hugh Broughton thinks, has reference to this man.}

9. The children of Bethlehem (v. 21) were but 123, though it was David's city; for Bethlehem was *little among the thousands of Judah*, yet there must the Messiah arise, ^{^{R19}Micah 5:2. 10. Anathoth had been a famous place in the tribe of Benjamin and yet here it numbered but 128 (v. 23),}

which is to be imputed to the divine curse which the men of Anathoth brought upon themselves by persecuting Jeremiah, who was of their city. ^{<2412>}Jeremiah 11:21, 23, *There shall be no remnant of them, for I will bring evil upon the men of Anathoth.* And see ^{<2303>}Isaiah 10:30, *O poor Anathoth!* Nothing brings ruin on a people sooner than persecution.

^{<1523>}EZRA 2:36-63

THE RETURN OF THE CAPTIVES

Here is an account,

I. Of the priests that returned, and they were a considerable number, about a tenth part of the whole company: for the whole were above 42,000 (v. 64), and four families of priests made up above 4200 (v. 36-39); thus was the tenth God's part — a blessed decimation. Three of the fathers of the priests here named were heads of courses, ^{<1347>}1 Chronicles 24:7, 8, 14. The fourth was Pashur, v. 38. If these were of the posterity of that Pashur that abused Jeremiah (^{<2011>}Jeremiah 20:1), it is strange that so bad a man should have so good a seed, and so numerous.

II. Of the Levites. I cannot but wonder at the small number of them, for, taking in both the singers and the porters (v. 40-42), they did not make 350. Time was when the Levites were more forward to their duty than the priests (^{<1428>}2 Chronicles 29:34), but they were not so now. If one place, one family, has the reputation for pious zeal now, another may have it another time. *The wind blows where it listeth*, and shifts its points.

III. Of the Nethinim, who, it is supposed, were the Gibeonites, *given* (so their name signifies) by Joshua first (^{<8127>}Joshua 9:27), and again by David (^{<1580>}Ezra 8:20), when Saul had expelled them, to be employed by the Levites in the work of God's house as hewers of wood and drawers of water; and, with them, of the children of Solomon's servants, whom he gave for the like use (whether they were Jews or Gentiles does not appear) and who were here taken notice of among the retainers of the temple and numbered with the Nethinim, v. 55, 58. Note, It is an honour to belong to God's house, though in the meanest office there.

IV. Of some that were looked upon as Israelites by birth, and others as priests, and yet could not make out a clear title to the honour.

1. There were some that could not prove themselves Israelites (v. 59, 60), a considerable number, who presumed they were of the seed of Jacob, but could not produce their pedigrees, and yet would go up to Jerusalem, having an affection to the house and people of God. These shamed those who were true-born Israelites, and yet were not called Israelites indeed, *who came out of the waters of Judah* (^{2381E} Isaiah 48:1), but had lost the relish of those waters.

2. There were others that could not prove themselves priests, and yet were supposed to be of the seed of Aaron. What is not preserved in black and white will, in all likelihood, be forgotten in a little time. Now we are here told,

(1.) How they lost their evidence. One of their ancestors married a daughter of Barzillai, that great man whom we read of in David's time; he gloried in an alliance to that honourable family, and, preferring that before the dignity of his priesthood, would have his children called after Barzillai's family, and their pedigree preserved in the registers of that house, not of the house of Aaron, and so they lost it. In Babylon there was nothing to be got by the priesthood, and therefore they cared not for being akin to it. Those who think their ministry, or their relation to ministers, a diminution or disparagement to them, forget who it was that said, *I magnify my office.*

(2.) What they lost with it. It could not be taken for granted that they were priests when they could not produce their proofs, but they were, *as polluted, put from the priesthood.* Now that the priests had recovered their rights, and had the altar to live upon again, they would gladly be looked upon as priests. But they had sold their birthright for the honour of being gentlemen, and therefore were justly degraded, and forbidden to *eat of the most holy things.* Note, Christ will be ashamed of those that are ashamed of him and his service. It was the tirshatha, or governor, that put them under this sequestration, which some understand of Zerubbabel the present governor, others of Nehemiah (who is so called, ^{468B} Nehemiah 8:9, 10:1, and who gave this order when he came some years after); but the prohibition was not absolute, it was only a suspension, till there should be a high priest *with Urim and Thummin*, by whom they might know God's mind in this matter. This, it seems, was expected and desired, but it does

not appear that ever they were blessed with it under the second temple. They had the canon of the Old Testament complete, which was better than Urim; and, by the want of that oracle, they were taught to expect the Messiah the great Oracle, which the Urim and Thummim was but a type of. Nor does it appear that the second temple had the ark in it, either the old one or a new one. Those shadows by degrees vanished, as the substance approached; and God, by the prophet, intimates to his people that they should sustain no damage by the want of the ark, ^{<4126>}Jeremiah 3:16, 17. *In those days, when they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord, neither shall it come to mind, for they shall do very well without it.*

^{<4126>}EZRA 2:64-70

THE RETURN OF THE CAPTIVES

Here is,

I. The sum total of the company that returned out of Babylon. The particular sums before mentioned amount not quite to 30,000 (29, 818), so that there were above 12,000 that come out into any of those accounts, who, it is probable, were of the rest of the tribes of Israel, besides Judah and Benjamin, that could not tell of what particular family or city they were, but that they were Israelites, and of what tribe. Now,

1. This was more than double the number that were carried captive into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, so that, as in Egypt, the time of their affliction was the time of their increase.

2. These were but few to begin a nation with, and yet, by virtue of the old promise made to their fathers, they multiplied so as before their last destruction by the Romans, about 500 years after, to be a very numerous people. When God says, "Increase and multiply," *a little one shall become a thousand.*

II. Their retinue. They were themselves little better than servants, and therefore no wonder that their servants were comparatively but few (v. 65) and their beasts of burden about as many, v. 66, 67. It was not with them

now as in days past. But notice is taken of 200 *singing-men and women* whom they had among them, who, we will suppose, were intended (as those ^{<14825>}2 Chronicles 35:25) to excite *their mourning*, for it was foretold that they should, upon this occasion, *go weeping* (^{<28104>}Jeremiah 50:4), with ditties of lamentation.

III. Their oblations. It is said (v. 68, 69),

1. That they *came to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem*; and yet that house, that holy and beautiful house, was now in ruins, a heap of rubbish. But, like their father Abraham, when the altar was gone they came with devotion to *the place of the altar* (^{<01134>}Genesis 13:4); and it is the character of the genuine sons of Zion that they favour even *the dust thereof*, ^{<94214>}Psalms 102:14.
2. That they offered freely towards the *setting of it up in its place*. That, it seems, was the first house they talked of setting up; and though they came off a journey, and were beginning the world (two chargeable things), yet they offered, and offered freely, towards the building of the temple. Let none complain of the necessary expenses of their religion, but believe that when they come to balance the account they will find that it clears the cost. Their offering was nothing in comparison with the offerings of the princes in David's time; then they offered by talents (^{<13307>}1 Chronicles 29:7), now by drams, yet these drams, being after their ability, were as acceptable to God as those talents, like the widow's two mites. The 61,000 drams of gold amount, by Cumberland's calculation, to so many pounds of our money and so many groats. Every maneh, or pound of silver, he reckons to be sixty shekels (that is, thirty ounces), which we may reckon 7*l.* 10*s.* of our money, so that this 5000 pounds of silver will be above 37,000*l.* of our money. It seems, God had blessed them with an increase of their wealth, as well as of their numbers, in Babylon; and, as God had prospered them, they gave cheerfully to the service of his house.
3. That they *dwelt in their cities*, v. 70. Though their cities were out of repair, yet, because they were their cities, such as God had assigned them, they were content to dwell in them, and were thankful for liberty and property, though they had little of pomp, plenty, or power. Their poverty was a bad cause, but their unity and unanimity were a good effect of it. Here was room enough for them all and all their substance, so that there was no strife among them, but perfect harmony, a blessed presage of their

settlement, as their discords in the latter times of that state were of their ruin.