

Cyrus' [Persia] Proclamation—the End of the Exile (c. May 538 BC)

2 Chronicles 36:20b–23

Ezra 1:1–4

20b and they [the Jewish exiles] were servants to him [Nebuchadnezzar] and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia,
 21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.
 22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia—in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah—the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying,
 23 “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!’”

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying:
 2 “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.
 3 Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem.
 4 Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.’”

The Remnant Prepare to Return to Jerusalem (c. May–December 538 BC)

Ezra 1:5–11

5 Then the heads of fathers' *households* of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.
 6 All those about them encouraged them with articles of silver, with gold, with goods, with cattle and with valuables, aside from all that was given as a freewill offering.
 7 Also King Cyrus brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and put in the house of his gods;
 8 and Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.
 9 Now this *was* their number: 30 gold dishes, 1,000 silver dishes, 29 duplicates;
 10 30 gold bowls, 410 silver bowls of a second *kind and* 1,000 other articles.
 11 All the articles of gold and silver *numbered* 5,400. Sheshbazzar brought them all up with the exiles who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The Return of the Exiles Under Zerubbabel (Spring 537 BC)

Ezra 2	Nehemiah 7:5b–73a
<p>Leadership</p> <p>1 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.</p> <p>2a These came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum <i>and</i> Baanah.</p> <p>General Population</p> <p>2b The number of the men of the people of Israel:</p> <p>3 the sons of Parosh, 2,172;</p> <p>4 the sons of Shephatiah, 372;</p> <p>5 the sons of Arah, 775;</p> <p>6 the sons of Pahath-moab of the sons of Jeshua <i>and</i> Joab, 2,812;</p> <p>7 the sons of Elam, 1,254;</p> <p>8 the sons of Zattu, 945;</p> <p>9 the sons of Zaccai, 760;</p> <p>10 the sons of Bani, 642;</p> <p>11 the sons of Bebai, 623;</p> <p>12 the sons of Azgad, 1,222;</p> <p>13 the sons of Adonikam, 666;</p> <p>14 the sons of Bigvai, 2,056;</p> <p>15 the sons of Adin, 454;</p> <p>16 the sons of Ater of Hezekiah, 98;</p> <p>17 the sons of Bezai, 323;</p> <p>18 the sons of Jorah, 112;</p> <p>19 the sons of Hashum, 223;</p> <p>20 the sons of Gibbar, 95;</p> <p>21 the men of Bethlehem, 123;</p> <p>22 the men of Netophah, 56;</p> <p>23 the men of Anathoth, 128;</p> <p>24 the sons of Azmaveth, 42;</p> <p>25 the sons of Kiriath-arim, Chephirah and Beeroth, 743;</p> <p>26 the sons of Ramah and Geba, 621;</p> <p>27 the men of Michmas, 122;</p> <p>28 the men of Bethel and Ai, 223;</p> <p>29 the sons of Nebo, 52;</p> <p>30 the sons of Magbish, 156;</p> <p>31 the sons of the other Elam, 1,254;</p>	<p>5b Then I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up first in which I found the following record:</p> <p>6 These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city,</p> <p>7a who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah.</p> <p>7b The number of men of the people of Israel:</p> <p>8 the sons of Parosh, 2,172;</p> <p>9 the sons of Shephatiah, 372;</p> <p>10 the sons of Arah, 652;</p> <p>11 the sons of Pahath-moab of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2,818;</p> <p>12 the sons of Elam, 1,254;</p> <p>13 the sons of Zattu, 845;</p> <p>14 the sons of Zaccai, 760;</p> <p>15 the sons of Binnui, 648;</p> <p>16 the sons of Bebai, 628;</p> <p>17 the sons of Azgad, 2,322;</p> <p>18 the sons of Adonikam, 667;</p> <p>19 the sons of Bigvai, 2,067;</p> <p>20 the sons of Adin, 655;</p> <p>21 the sons of Ater, of Hezekiah, 98;</p> <p>23 the sons of Bezai, 324;</p> <p>24 the sons of Hariph, 112;</p> <p>22 the sons of Hashum, 328;</p> <p>25 the sons of Gibeon, 95;</p> <p>26 the men of Bethlehem and Netophah, 188;</p> <p>27 the men of Anathoth, 128;</p> <p>28 the men of Beth-azmaveth, 42;</p> <p>29 the men of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah and Beeroth, 743;</p> <p>30 the men of Ramah and Geba, 621;</p> <p>31 the men of Michmas, 122;</p> <p>32 the men of Bethel and Ai, 123;</p> <p>33 the men of the other Nebo, 52;</p> <p>34 the sons of the other Elam, 1,254;</p>

32 the sons of Harim, 320;
 33 the sons of Lod, Hadid and Ono, 725;
 34 the men of Jericho, 345;
 35 the sons of Senaah, 3,630.

Priests

36 The priests: the sons of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973;
 37 the sons of Immer, 1,052;
 38 the sons of Pashhur, 1,247;
 39 the sons of Harim, 1,017.

Levites

40 The Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodaviah, 74.
 41 The singers: the sons of Asaph, 128.
 42 The sons of the gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, the sons of Shobai, in all 139.

Temple Servants

43 The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth,
 44 the sons of Keros, the sons of Siaha, the sons of Padon,
 45 the sons of Lebanah, the sons of Hagabah, the sons of Akkub,
 46 the sons of Hagab, the sons of Shalmal,
 the sons of Hanan,
 47 the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar, the sons of Reaiah,
 48 the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda, the sons of Gazzam,
 49 the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah, the sons of Besai,
 50 the sons of Asnah, the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephisim,
 51 the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur,
 52 the sons of Bazluth, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha,
 53 the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Temah,
 54 the sons of Neziah, the sons of Hatipha.

Descendants of Solomon's Servants

55 The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai,

35 the sons of Harim, 320;
 37 the sons of Lod, Hadid and Ono, 721;
 36 the men of Jericho, 345;
 38 the sons of Senaah, 3,930.

39 The priests: the sons of Jedaiah of the house of Jeshua, 973;
 40 the sons of Immer, 1,052;
 41 the sons of Pashhur, 1,247;
 42 the sons of Harim, 1,017.

43 The Levites: the sons of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, of the sons of Hodevah, 74.
 44 The singers: the sons of Asaph, 148.
 45 The gatekeepers: the sons of Shallum, the sons of Ater, the sons of Talmon, the sons of Akkub, the sons of Hatita, the sons of Shobai, 138.

46 The temple servants: the sons of Ziha, the sons of Hasupha, the sons of Tabbaoth,
 47 the sons of Keros, the sons of Sia, the sons of Padon,
 48 the sons of Lebana, the sons of Hagaba,

the sons of Shalmal,
 49 the sons of Hanan, the sons of Giddel, the sons of Gahar,
 50 the sons of Reaiah, the sons of Rezin, the sons of Nekoda,
 51 the sons of Gazzam, the sons of Uzza, the sons of Paseah,
 52 the sons of Besai,

the sons of Meunim, the sons of Nephushesim,
 53 the sons of Bakbuk, the sons of Hakupha, the sons of Harhur,
 54 the sons of Bazlith, the sons of Mehida, the sons of Harsha,
 55 the sons of Barkos, the sons of Sisera, the sons of Temah,
 56 the sons of Neziah, the sons of Hatipha.

57 The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai,

the sons of Hassophereth, the sons of Peruda,
56 the sons of Jaalah, the sons of Darkon,
the sons of Giddel,
57 the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil,
the sons of Pochereth-hazzebaim, the sons of Ami.
58 All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's
servants were 392.

Israelites of Doubtful Origin

59 Now these are those who came up from
Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan *and* Immer,
but they were not able to give evidence of their
fathers' households and their descendants,
whether they were of Israel:
60 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah,
the sons of Nekoda, 652.

Priests of Doubtful Origin

61 Of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah,
the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai,
who took a wife from the daughters of Barzillai
the Gileadite, and he was called by their name.
62 These searched *among* their ancestral
registration, but they could not be located;
therefore they were considered unclean *and*
excluded from the priesthood.
63 The governor said to them that they should not
eat from the most holy things until a priest stood up
with Urim and Thummim.

Totals

64 The whole assembly numbered 42,360,
65 besides their male and female servants
who numbered 7,337;
and they had 200 singing men and women.
66 Their horses were 736; their mules, 245;
67 their camels, 435; *their* donkeys, 6,720.

Arrival in Jerusalem

68 Some of the heads of fathers'
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.
69 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.

the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Perida,
58 the sons of Jaala, the sons of Darkon,
the sons of Giddel,
59 the sons of Shephatiah, the sons of Hattil,
the sons of Pochereth-hazzebaim, the sons of Amon.
60 All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's
servants *were* 392.

61 These *were* they who came up from
Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon and Immer;
but they could not show their
fathers' houses or their descendants,
whether they were of Israel:
62 the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah,
the sons of Nekoda, 642.

63 Of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah,
the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai,
who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai,
the Gileadite, and was named after them.

64 These searched *among* their ancestral
registration, but it could not be located;
therefore they were considered unclean *and*
excluded from the priesthood.

65 The governor said to them that they should not
eat from the most holy things until a priest arose
with Urim and Thummim.

66 The whole assembly together *was* 42,360,
67 besides their male and their female servants,
of whom *there were* 7,337;
and they had 245 male and female singers.
68 Their horses were 736; their mules, 245;
69 *their* camels, 435; *their* donkeys, 6,720.

70 Some from among the heads of fathers'
households

gave
to the work.

The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 gold
drachmas, 50 basins, 530 priests' garments.

70 Now the priests 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.	71 Some of the heads of fathers' households gave into the treasury of the work 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,200 silver minas. 72 That which the rest of the people gave was 20,000 gold drachmas and 2,000 silver minas and 67 priests' garments. 73a Now the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants and all Israel, lived in their cities.
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Altar Rebuilt and Normal Sacrificial Activities Resumed (September 537 BC)

Ezra 3:1–7

The Rebuilding of the Altar

1 Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem.

2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

3 So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening.

The Festival of Booths

4 They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and *offered* the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required;

5 and afterward *there was* a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of the LORD that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the LORD.

6a From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD,

The Beginning of Temple Reconstruction

6b but the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid.

7 Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia.

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Chronological Notes

1) Ezra's Calendar.

A) I am currently of the opinion that Ezra used a Tishri-to-Tishri (Fall-to-Fall) calendar.¹ This is primarily due to the fact that Ezra and Nehemiah are closely connected and Nehemiah used a Tishri-to-Tishri

¹ For a defense of this position see the following: Siegfried H. Horn and Lynn H. Wood, *The Chronology of Ezra 7* (Brushton, NY: TEACH Services, 2006), Siegfried H. Horn and Lynn H. Wood, "The Fifth-Century Jewish Calendar at Elephantine," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 13 (Jan 1954): 1–20, and Frank W. Hardy, "The Context for Ezra's Use of a Fall-to-Fall Calendar," *Historicism* No. 8 (Oct 86): 2–65.

calendar (cf. Neh 1:1; 2:1). I am not alone in this opinion—many other scholars have argued for this position: Hoehner, Thiele, Horn, Keil, Yamauchi, Getz, Fensham, Loken, Laney, Shea, Young and Hardy (note that several of these scholars are Seventh-Day Adventists, and so have a special interest in the chronology of Ezra, Nehemiah and Daniel). Steinmann, however, is of the opinion that Ezra used a Nisan-to-Nisan (Spring-to-Spring) calendar (so also Williamson, Clines and McFall). Thus I will be diverging from Steinmann's dates for the chronology of Ezra and Nehemiah (usually only by a single year).

2) The Date of the First Return.²

- A) The book of Ezra contains numerous chronological references. It begins with Ezra 1:1's reference to Cyrus' first year as king of Babylon (538/537 BC) and ends with Ezra 10:17's reference to the first day of the first month of what is apparently Artaxerxes' eighth year (March 27, 457 BC). Between these two verses are sixteen other references to specific years, months, or days (3:1, 6, 8; 4:24; 5:13, 6:3, 15, 19; 7:7, 8, 9 (twice); 8:31, 33; 10:9, 16).
- B) Despite this wealth of chronological data, the date of the first major event in the book following Cyrus' decree—the return of exiles under the leadership of Zerubbabel—is not recorded. The closest the writer comes to dating this event is Ezra 3:8 which implies that the events of Ezra 2:1–3:7 took place in the first year “after their arrival at the house of God, at Jerusalem” (Ezra 3:8). But that does not answer the question of when the exiles first returned to Jerusalem. It must have happened sometime after Cyrus' decree in 538 BC in his first year and sometime before the end of his reign in 530 BC, since Ezra 4:5 indicates that the effort to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem was stalled during the reign of Cyrus.
- C) The return probably occurred earlier in Cyrus' reign rather than late in his reign, since after the return, the work on the temple began but then was stopped for “all the [rest of the] days of King Cyrus of Persia” (Ezra 4:5), and that phrase seems ill-suited if the return to Jerusalem (and subsequently the start of the work on the temple) had only taken place during the last year or two of his reign.
- D) Steinmann argues (based on the postexilic cycle of Sabbatical Years, pp. 37–39) that the first return occurred in 533 BC, some five years after Cyrus' decree in 538 BC permitting the return. He defends this view by listing several reasons why it is “not at all unreasonable” (cf. pp. 38–39). However, the current majority view is that the return occurred very early in Cyrus' reign, that is, in 538/537.
- E) At this time, I have decided to go with the current majority view and date the first return to the Spring of 537 BC. I may revisit this decision at some time in the future.

² See Andrew E. Steinmann, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, Concordia Commentary (Concordia Publishing House, 2010): 29–39 and “A Chronological Note: The Return of the Exiles under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel (Ezra 1–2),” *JETS* 51.3 (2008): 513–22.