RETURNING FROM THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell about the Jews’ return from their Babylonian captivity, rebuilding of the Temple, and the restoration of Jerusalem. It covers a period in history of about 100 years.¹

**Ezra 1:1-3**

1: Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia [almost seventy years after the first Jewish captives were taken to Babylon], that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might begin to be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and put it also in writing:

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 charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem in Judah.

3: Whoever is among you of all His people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel, in Jerusalem; He is God.

● These verses fulfill the prophecy of several scriptures; some of which are:
  ♦ Isaiah 44:26 - 45:4
  ♦ Jeremiah 29:10-14

The Isaiah scriptures call Cyrus by his name, 176 years before the prophecy was fulfilled.

● Cyrus is king of Persia.

● Cyrus releases those who were taken into captivity to Babylon, to return to Jerusalem in Judah.

● The purpose of this release is to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

Returning to their own land occurred in three phases. The first phase is retold in Ezra 1 - Ezra 6. The second phase begins in Ezra 7 - Ezra 10. There are about 79 years between Ezra 1 and Ezra 7. The third and final phase of the returning exiles begins in Nehemiah 2. This occurs about twelve years after Ezra 7.

Lists of those returning from the Babylonian captivity are offered in both Ezra and Nehemiah. Through the use of genealogy lists, they are found in these chapters:

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¹Halley’s Bible Handbook - pg. 229
A LOOK AT THOSE RETURNING

Ezra 1:5
5: Then rose up the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites, with all those whose spirits God had stirred up, to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.

- Those returning are:
  - Tribe of Judah.
  - Tribe of Benjamin.
  - Priests.
  - Tribe of Levi.
  - Those whose spirits, Yehovah had stirred up.

The first list in Ezra contains a very interesting name.

Ezra 2:2, 3:2
2: These came with Zerubbabel ... 3:2 ... and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel ...

Haggai 2:21
21: Speak to Zerubbabel [the representative of the Davidic monarchy and covenant, and in direct line of the ancestry of Jesus Christ], governor of Judah ...

- Zerubbabel was the son of Shealtiel and the grandson of Jehoiachin, the next to the last king in the Kingdom of Judah.

- This particular man, Zerubbabel, shows up in the genealogy of Yeshua (Matthew 1:12); therefore, continuing on the Judah line, eternal scepter promise. Yeshua is the Shiloh who will fulfill these promises given to Judah (Genesis 49:10).

THOSE OF NO RECORD

Within the lists given in Ezra and Nehemiah, are names of those who could not prove their ancestry. They could not prove if they were of Israel’s descent.

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2Young’s Analytical Concordance - pg. 1088
Ezra 2:59-62

59: And these were they who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer, but they could not show a record of their fathers’ houses or prove their descent, whether they were of Israel:

60: The sons of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda, 652.

61: And of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, of Hakkoz, and of Barzillai, who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the [noted] Gileadite, and had assumed their name.

62: These sought their names among those enrolled in the genealogies, but they were not found; so they were excluded from the priesthood as [ceremonially] unclean.

- The sons of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda, could not prove their descent.
  - The total number of these were 652.

- The sons of Habaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai, who were priests, could not prove their descent.
  - The sons of these priests were, also, excluded from the priesthood as ceremonially unclean.

This list appears again in Nehemiah 7:61-64. What can this possibly mean? If Yehovah has allowed this fact to be a part of the Holy Scriptures in the Word of God, it must be significant. There must be something that can be compared to in scripture elsewhere. I have earnestly prayed for these scriptures to come to my understanding and I can only come up with one explanation.

2 Chronicles 15:9

9: And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin and the strangers with them out of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon; for they came over to Asa out of Israel in large numbers, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.

- It refers to them as “strangers.”

Could it be that these persons, mentioned in Ezra 2:59-62 and again in Nehemiah 7:61-64, are those descendants from the “strangers” who came in large numbers out of the Kingdom of Israel, during Asa’s reign in Judah? Although coming from the Kingdom of Israel, the judgments from Yehovah would still be in motion. Two judgments on the Kingdom of Israel were to loose their name and identity. So, even if they had come over into the Kingdom of Judah, these judgments would still pertain to them.

Who exactly did return from the Babylonian captivity? Which tribes were involved in returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple?
Using both "Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible" and "Young's Analytical Concordance," a thorough search of each tribe mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah showed the following conclusions. A search of all forms that the tribe might appear was included; such as, Reuben/Reubenites, etc. The number under each book, corresponds to the number of times they appear in one form or another; such as Levi or Levites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Ezra</th>
<th>Nehemiah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reuben</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simeon</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levi</td>
<td>23 times</td>
<td>39 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judah</td>
<td>19 times</td>
<td>28 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zebulun</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issachar</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gad</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naphtali</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephraim</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manasseh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>4 times</td>
<td>6 times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What does this show us? It proves the scripture of:

**Ezra 1:5**

5: Then rose up the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites, with all those whose spirits God had stirred up, to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.

- Those returning are:
  - Tribe of Judah.
  - Tribe of Benjamin.
  - Priests.
  - Tribe of Levi.

- Also returning are those whose spirits, Yehovah had stirred up.
  - Ezra 2:59-62 } Possibly those who could not
  - Nehemiah 7:61-64 } prove their ancestry.

So far, there has been no proof shown that the Kingdom of Israel was involved in returning to Jerusalem with the Kingdom of Judah. Is it possible that I may be missing something? I know there
is nothing new in the scriptures; it is just waiting there to be found. I also know that Yehovah will reveal great and mighty things, when all we need to do is ask.

Where does the dispersion of the Kingdom of Israel and the captivity of the Kingdom of Judah fall on a time chart?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Approximate Year³</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Samuel 11-1 Kings 11</td>
<td>The Kings: Saul, David, Solomon</td>
<td>1095-975 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Kings 12</td>
<td>The Division of Israel</td>
<td>975 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Kings 17</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Dispersion of the Kingdom of Israel</strong></td>
<td><strong>721 BC</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Chronicles 36</strong></td>
<td><strong>The Captivity of the Kingdom of Judah</strong></td>
<td><strong>606 BC</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezra - Nehemiah</td>
<td>Return from captivity in Babylon</td>
<td>536-432 BC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this chart, we see that the Kingdom of Israel fell about 115 years before the Kingdom of Judah fell and was taken into captivity. After the fall of the Kingdom of Israel, there are no recorded lists of their return, anywhere.

By the time the first release of the captives from Babylon took place, a period of 185 years had already elapsed since the fall and dispersion of the Kingdom of Israel. It appears as if the Kingdom of Israel has disappeared, or they have just been “swallowed up.”

There is not any proof in the scripture accounts of Ezra and Nehemiah that the Kingdom of Israel was among those returning. The only hint that there might have been some returning, is the scripture that may refer to them as, “those whose spirits Yehovah stirred up.”

But, why are there no lists? If the tribes from the Kingdom of Israel have not been included in the lists of returning exiles of Ezra and Nehemiah, there must be an explanation. They were included in all the genealogy lists before the division into two kingdoms.

A Believer I know once said, “The New Testament is in the Old Testament, concealed; the Old Testament is in the New Testament, revealed.” This is very true, so maybe the New Testament will give some answers to the whereabouts of the Kingdom of Israel.

³Approximate dates gathered from “Halley’s Bible Handbook”, pg. 34
Again, included was a search of all forms that the tribe might appear; such as, Reuben/Reubenites, etc. The number under each heading, corresponds to the number of times they appear in one form or another; such as Levi or Levites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Matthew-Jude</th>
<th>Revelation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reuben</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simeon</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levi</td>
<td>6 times⁴</td>
<td>7:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judah</td>
<td>7 times⁵</td>
<td>5:5/7:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zebulun</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issachar</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gad</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher</td>
<td>1 time⁶</td>
<td>7:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naphtali</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephraim</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manasseh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin</td>
<td>3 times⁷</td>
<td>7:8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chart has a definite similarity to the chart given for Ezra and Nehemiah. It is not until Revelation 7 that we, again, see the names of the sons of Israel (Jacob).

**CONCERNING THE TRIBE OF ASHER**

What conclusions can be made about the one and only time a tribe from the Kingdom of Israel is mentioned?

**What about Anna?**

**Luke 2:36** (After the days of Mary’s purification were complete)

36: And there was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher ...

- She was a prophetess.
- Her name was Anna.

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⁴Luke 10:32; John 1:19; Acts 4:36; Hebrews 7:5,9,11

⁵Matthew 1:2; 2:6,3; Luke 1:39; 3:33; Hebrews 7:14, 8:8

⁶Luke 2:36

⁷Acts 13:21; Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5
She is the daughter of Phanuel.

She is from the tribe of Asher.

This is the one and only time a tribe that came from the Kingdom of Israel is ever mentioned. The kingdom’s collapse had occurred about 721 years before this event; and there are no genealogy lists after their downfall. What importance can this verse have?

Once one begins to dig, there is much information given to us in this one verse about a woman who appears only one time in all Scriptures. Here is a breakdown of her name meanings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Grace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phanuel</td>
<td>Face of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher</td>
<td>Blessed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each name has a very significant meaning describing this baby she was looking at on that day. There she was, looking down into the blessed face of God; whose life, death, and resurrection would fulfill “their” grace to all mankind. Yehovah loves us so much that He poured Himself into a human container!

Now, look at the description given to us concerning her life. She is called a prophetess because Yehovah allowed certain truths to be revealed her. Could He also reveal to Anna the lineage of her ancestors? Why not? His promise is to never loose sight of even one from the Kingdom of Israel must be believed — even to this day!

Returning, again, to those tribes which were involved in coming out of the Babylonian captivity.

**SOMETHING FOR YOU TO CONSIDER**

1 Chronicles 9:1-3

1: So all Israel was enrolled by genealogies; and they are written in the Book of Kings of Israel. And Judah was carried away captive to Babylon for their unfaithfulness to God.

2: Now the first [of the returned exiles] to dwell again in their possessions in the cities of Israel were the priest, Levites, and the Nethinim [the temple servants].

3: In Jerusalem dwelt some of the people of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh ...

This scripture (vs. 3) has raised another question for me. It just does not connect with anything else, but it needs to be considered in this study. The following are some commentaries that appear to be just as inconclusive:

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*Smith’s Bible Dictionary - pgs. 41, 505, 58*
My King James Version dates this chapter as 1200 BC. That is nearly 600 years before the return from the Babylonian captivity.

The “Wycliffe Bible Commentary,” on pages 374-375, says the following:

“After a transitional verse (9:1) that serves as a conclusion to the genealogies of Israel (1 Chr 2-8), this section moves to an enumeration of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, prior to the city’s capture and destruction in 586 BC ... An attempt, however is often made to equate this material with the later listing found in Neh 11:3-24, of Jerusalem’s post-Exilic groups. But despite a similarity in the over-all arrangement, the specific differences between these two lists are pronounced; and only by a forced rendering of 1 Chr 9:2 can the plausibility of the later dating of 1 Chronicles 9 be sustained.”

Read, also, the commentary “Wycliffe” states, on page 375, concerning 1 Chronicles 9:3. It says:

“The scattered individuals and families of Ephraim, and Manasseh are not mentioned in the lists that follow, which are limited to the heads of larger family groups or clans.”

I’m not disagreeing with Wycliffe’s commentary, but I need to point out the blessing given to Ephraim and Manasseh to “become a multitude in the midst of the earth.” Yehovah always makes good His promises. Would it not make sense, if a count was being taken that they at least would have been a family large enough to count. If they were there at all?

“Halley’s Bible Handbook,” comments on 1 Chronicles, chapters one through nine. The following is stated on page 214:

“These genealogies seem to have had for their immediate object the resettling of the land according to the public records. Those who had returned from the Captivity were entitled to lands formerly held in their own families. In the Old Testament, land had been apportioned to families, and could not be sold in perpetuity out of the family (see under Leviticus 25).

“... Most of the genealogies are incomplete, with many breaks in the lists. But the main line is there. They were probably compiled from many records which had been written on tablets, papyrus or vellum; partly copied from preceding Old Testament books.”

If this scripture was compiled from records that had been written, as Halley commented, I then see a cross-reference here to 2 Chronicles 15:19. Some of those from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh must have lived in or near the Jerusalem area.

2 Chronicles 15:9

9: And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin and the strangers with them out of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon; for they came over to Asa out of Israel in large numbers, when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.
You must draw your own conclusion concerning this verse. What we have seen so far with the scriptures, though, is that there are no records of Ephraim or Manasseh, in the lists of returning exiles, in the books of Ezra or Nehemiah.

**SUMMARY**

Although not mentioned in the contents of the study, the book of Esther covers a period between Ezra and Nehemiah. Esther does not offer a list of the returning exiles, but it needs noted that this book covers a most important historical account of how the Kingdom of Judah was delivered from total annihilation. Very important because some time later the promised “Seed” was born. If the Judah line had been wiped out of existence, it would have made a difference to the destiny of mankind; no Judah line would have meant no Messiah.

Returning from the Babylonian captivity occurred in three stages, during a period of about 100 years. It is recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. It was necessary to gather the Kingdom of Judah back into their own land following the Babylonian captivity; because some 536 years later, the promised Messiah, Yeshua, was born from the Judah line, and John the Baptist was born from the lineage of Levi. After these things were accomplished, the life of John the Baptist and the Messianic promises, the people from the Kingdom of Judah were dispersed again.

Not until more recent times, May 1948, did Israel become a nation once again. It had not been a nation since its division into two kingdoms, in 975 BC. Since 1948, the world has watched a vast number of Jews returning to Israel from the countries where they had gone. Are they the direct descendants of those who had previously belonged to the Kingdom of Judah, being from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, or Levi? I do believe so.

This brings up another point concerning the word, Jew. Eighty-four times, we can find the word, “Jew,” in the scriptures of the Old Testament. Each time, it refers to one belonging to the Kingdom of Judah; being from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, or Levi.

We see from the charts on pages four and six, these same three tribes mentioned in returning from the Babylonian captivity are the same three tribes mentioned in the New Testament, from Matthew to Jude, excluding the one account of the tribe of Asher. The word, “Jew,” in the New Testament may, also, refer to one being from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, or Levi.

I feel the tribes from the Kingdom of Israel did not return to Jerusalem and Judah, from the Babylonian captivity, with the tribes from the Kingdom of Judah. I know this is a very bold statement. I will have to stand behind the comparison of scriptures for its proof.