

Ezra 2:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The children of Arah, seven hundred seventy and five.

Analysis

A Remnant Returns from Exile: This verse appears within the meticulous genealogical record of the first wave of Jewish exiles returning from Babylon to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel's leadership (c. 538 BC). "The children of Arah" (bene Arach, בְּנֵי־אַרַח) identifies a specific family clan descended from a patriarch named Arah. The precision of "seven hundred seventy and five" demonstrates careful record-keeping and the importance of documenting who comprised the covenant community returning to rebuild the temple and restore worship.

The Significance of Names and Numbers: Biblical genealogies aren't merely dry statistics but testimonies to God's faithfulness across generations. Each name represents real people who made the arduous journey from Mesopotamia to Judah—approximately 900 miles, taking four months (Ezra 7:9). The Hebrew term "children" (bene, בְּנֵי) could include sons, grandsons, and all descendants of Arah's lineage. That 775 members of one family returned shows this wasn't a small, insignificant group but a substantial clan maintaining family identity through 70 years of exile.

Covenant Continuity and Divine Faithfulness: These genealogical lists (Ezra 2, paralleled in Nehemiah 7) served multiple purposes:

1. establishing rightful claim to ancestral property
2. verifying priestly lineages for temple service
3. determining who belonged to the covenant community,
4. demonstrating that God preserved His people through judgment as promised.

Jeremiah had prophesied 70 years of exile (Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10), and these lists prove God's word came true—a remnant survived and returned. Though this verse seems mundane, it's part of the larger narrative showing how God keeps covenant promises across centuries and through catastrophic judgments. Each numbered family testified that God remembered His people in exile and brought them home.

Historical Context

Ezra 2 documents the first return from Babylonian exile, occurring in 538 BC after Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon (539 BC) and issued his famous decree permitting Jews to return and rebuild the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 1:1-4). This fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy, made 150 years earlier, that specifically named Cyrus as God's instrument for restoration (Isaiah 44:28, 45:1). The Cyrus Cylinder, discovered in 1879, corroborates the biblical account—it records Cyrus's policy of allowing displaced peoples to return to their homelands and rebuild their sanctuaries.

The name "Arah" (אַרַח) means "traveler" or "wayfarer" in Hebrew, possibly indicating the family's ancestral occupation or character. This same family name appears in other biblical lists: 1 Chronicles 7:39 mentions Arah among Asher's descendants, and Nehemiah 6:18 refers to Shecaniah the son of Arah, whose daughter married Tobiah the Ammonite (one of Nehemiah's opponents). If these references connect to the same lineage, it demonstrates this family's continued prominence in post-exilic Judah.

The total number of returning exiles listed in Ezra 2 is 42,360, plus 7,337 servants and 200 singers (Ezra 2:64-65)—nearly 50,000 people. This was a small fraction of the Jewish population in Babylon; most chose to remain in comfortable exile rather than undertake the dangerous journey to a ruined land. The returning remnant demonstrated faith and covenant loyalty, choosing hardship in the Promised Land over prosperity in pagan Babylon. Their descendants would form the community into which Jesus would be born centuries later, preserving the messianic line and biblical faith.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. What does the meticulous record-keeping of returning exiles teach us about God's concern for individual people and families within His covenant community?
2. How does the small size of the returning remnant (compared to the total exiled population) illustrate that genuine faith often calls for sacrifice and choosing the harder path?
3. In what ways do these genealogical lists demonstrate God's faithfulness to keep His promises across generations and through judgment?
4. What is the spiritual significance of Jews maintaining family identity and genealogical records through 70 years of exile?
5. How does the return from exile foreshadow the greater spiritual return from sin's exile through Christ and the ultimate restoration of all things?

Interlinear Text

בְּנֵי י	אֶרַח ח	שִׁבְעַ ע	מֵא וְ	חֲמִשָּׁה ה	וְשִׁבְעִים:
The children	of Arah	seven	hundred	and five	seventy
H1121	H733	H7651	H3967	H2568	H7657

Additional Cross-References

Nehemiah 7:10 (Parallel theme): The children of Arah, six hundred fifty and two.

