

NOON BIBLE STUDY: EZRA 7-8

MANY EXILES HAVE RETURNED TO JERUSALEM AND NOW AFTER A LENGTHY INVESTIGATION INTO THE LEGALITY AND VALIDITY OF THE TEMPLE PROJECT, THE REBUILDING OF THE HOUSE OF GOD IS COMPLETE. THE WORSHIP OF THE TRUE GOD HAS RESUMED AT LAST. IN CHAPTERS 7-8 WE WILL MEET EZRA WHO WILL BE SENT FROM PERSIA/BABYLON TO JERUSALEM. HE'LL BRING WITH HIM ADDITIONAL EXILES, MANY OF WHOM ARE PRIESTS AND HE WILL PROCEED WITH THIS JOURNEY WITH THE BLESSING OF THE KING OF PERSIA HIMSELF.

EZRA 7:1-7 - EZRA ARRIVES IN JERUSALEM

FINALLY, EZRA, THE NAMESAKE OF OUR BOOK ARRIVES IN JERUSALEM AND IN OUR STORY. THE FIRST FEW VERSES OF CHAPTER 7 GIVE US SOME INSIGHT INTO WHO EZRA WAS.

BIOLOGICALLY HE IS THE DIRECT DESCENDANT OF AARON, THE FIRST HIGH PRIEST. *SPIRITUALLY* HE IS A "SCRIBE, SKILLED IN THE LAW OF MOSES, AND HAS "THE HAND OF THE LORD HIS GOD" UPON HIM (V. 6). HE APPEARS TO HAVE REQUESTED THE OPPORTUNITY GO TO JERUSALEM AND WILL TRAVEL WITH A COMMISSIONING FROM THE KING, ARTAXERXES (MORE ON THIS LATER).

EZRA 7:8-10 - EZRA'S PURPOSE

HERE WE LEARN OF THE REASON WHY EZRA HAS TRAVELED (THE 4 MONTH JOURNEY!) TO JERUSALEM: TO STUDY THE LAW OF THE LORD, PRACTICE IT ~~AND~~ TEACH GOD'S STATUTES AND ORDINANCES IN ISRAEL. ZERUBBABEL'S MISSION WAS SPIRITUAL, BUT RELATED TO PHYSICAL CONSTRUCTION - NOW EZRA'S MISSION IS ALSO SPIRITUAL, BUT IN THE TRADITIONAL, RELIGIOUS AND DEVOTIONAL SENSE.

EZRA 7:11-20 - ARTAXERXES' LETTER (PART 1)

ARTAXERXES ISSUES A DECREE ALLOWING EZRA, ALONG WITH ANY REMAINING PEOPLE OF ISRAEL IN BABYLON/PERSIA TO RETURN TO JERUSALEM. HE SENDS HIS BLESSING AND FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORT TO BE USED TO SACRIFICE AND PROVIDE FOR THE RETURNING PEOPLE AND THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE.

EZRA 7:21-24 - ARTAXERXES' LETTER (CONTINUED)

LET'S THINK ABOUT WHAT WE JUST READ. THE PAGAN LEADER OF THE CURRENT WORLD EMPIRE IS ORDERING THAT HIS KINGDOM SUPPORT THE PEOPLE AND WORSHIP OF THE LORD. THINK ABOUT THIS IN IT'S TRUE HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND NOT AS IF IT IS JUST A CUTE BIBLE STORY, WHERE OF COURSE EVERYONE IS HELPING GOD'S PEOPLE - THIS IS REALLY AN AMAZING THING. LET'S RE-READ THIS SECTION IN THE NEW LIVING TRANSLATION:

EZRA 7:21-24 (NLT) - "I, ARTAXERXES THE KING, HEREBY SEND THIS DECREE TO ALL THE TREASURERS IN THE PROVINCE WEST OF THE EUPHRATES RIVER: 'YOU ARE TO GIVE EZRA, THE PRIEST AND TEACHER OF THE LAW OF THE GOD OF HEAVEN, WHATEVER HE REQUESTS OF YOU. 22 YOU ARE TO GIVE HIM UP TO 7,500 POUNDS OF SILVER, 500 BUSHELS OF WHEAT, 550 GALLONS OF WINE, 550 GALLONS OF OLIVE OIL, AND AN UNLIMITED SUPPLY OF SALT. 23 BE CAREFUL TO PROVIDE

WHATEVER THE GOD OF HEAVEN DEMANDS FOR HIS TEMPLE, FOR WHY SHOULD WE RISK BRINGING GOD'S ANGER AGAINST THE REALM OF THE KING AND HIS SONS? 24 I ALSO DECREE THAT NO PRIEST, LEVITE, SINGER, GATEKEEPER, TEMPLE SERVANT, OR OTHER WORKER IN THIS TEMPLE OF GOD WILL BE REQUIRED TO PAY TRIBUTE, CUSTOMS, OR TOLLS OF ANY KIND.'

EZRA 7:25-26 - ARTAXERXES' LETTER (REGARDING EZRA)

EZRA IS ARRIVING IN JERUSALEM WITH BOTH GOD & THE EMPEROR'S BLESSING AND COMMISSION TO TEACH THE PEOPLE THE WAYS OF THE LORD. WE BEGIN TO SEE IN THIS CHAPTER THAT THE PEOPLE, THOUGH RETURNED TO THE PROMISED LAND, AND RESUMING THE WORSHIP (PASSOVER, FESTIVALS, ETC), MAY NOT KNOW OR BE FOLLOWING THE WORDS OF THE COVENANT TO THE "T".

THE WORDS OF GOD GIVEN TO MOSES ARE WHAT ENSURED THAT THE NATION WAS "SPECIAL/CHOSEN" - IT WAS HOW THEY WOULD REMAIN "HOLY AS I AM HOLY". IT WASN'T JUST THEIR BEST GUESS AT WHAT ACTIONS AND PLANS WOULD BE PLEASING TO GOD, IT WAS THEIR ADHERENCE TO THE EXACT WORD OF GOD. AND THIS IS WHY WHAT EZRA WAS BRINGING WAS SO IMPORTANT. CLEARLY, FROM THE NEXT VERSES, WE SEE THAT EZRA WAS AMAZED AT THIS TASK:

EZRA 7:27-28 - EZRA'S RESPONSE

EZRA IS AND WILL BE A LEADER, BUT HE IS HUMBLE TO RECOGNIZE THIS IS GOD'S DOING.

EZRA 8:1-14 - LIST OF ADDITIONAL PEOPLE WHO TRAVELED WITH EZRA

ESV STUDY BIBLE: "THE PARTY THAT RETURNED WITH EZRA WAS A CONSIDERABLE ADDITION TO THE COMMUNITY IN JUDAH. IT IS NUMBERED HERE ACCORDING TO THE HEADS OF THEIR FATHERS' HOUSES, I.E., HEADS OF FAMILIES (V. 1)."

AS WE READ ANOTHER LIST OF NAMES WHICH ARE MOSTLY UNKNOWN TO US AND TO THE BIBLICAL STORY, WE CAN HIGHLIGHT A FEW THINGS. FIRST, THE RETURNING GROUP INCLUDES DESCENDANTS OF THE AARONIC PRIESTLY LINE:

THERE ARE TWO PRIESTLY DIVISIONS, NAMELY, PHINEHAS (V. 2: SON OF ELEAZAR, NUM. 25:7) AND ITHAMAR (EZRA 8:2; SEE EX. 28:1). THESE WERE THE REMAINING SONS OF AARON FOLLOWING THE JUDGMENT ON NADAB AND ABIHU (LEV. 10:1-7). (ESV STUDY BIBLE)

SECONDLY, THE MENTION OF "THE SONS OF DAVID" IN VERSE 2 INDICATES MEMBERS OF THE DAVIDIC DYNASTY ROYAL LINE

EZRA'S PARTY THEREFORE AIMS TO REPLENISH THE PRIESTHOOD, AND PERHAPS ALSO TO RENEW THE CLAIMS OF THE DAVIDIC HOUSE TO RULE IN JUDAH. (ESV STUDY BIBLE)

EZRA 8:15-20 - NO LEVITES!

EZRA MEETS WITH THIS TRAVELING CARAVAN JUST OUTSIDE OF BABYLON (V. 15). EZRA DISCOVERS THAT HE HAS MANY MEN, AND EVEN SOME PRIESTS, BUT NO LEVITES AMONGST HIS GROUP. THE LEVITES HAD SPECIAL FUNCTIONS WITHIN THE TEMPLE SERVICE THAT WOULD BE LEFT UNDONE WITHOUT THEM. HE CALLS FOR A SECOND SEARCH OF REMAINING JEWS IN BABYLON TO INQUIRE ABOUT THOSE WHO WERE FROM THE TRIBE OF LEVI. HE FINDS SOME, WHO AGREE TO JOIN EZRA AND RETURN TO JERUSALEM.

EZRA CONSIDERS THE FINDING OF THE LEVITES, GOD'S FAVORABLE HAND UPON HIM AND HIS GROUP (V. 18).

EZRA 8:21-23 - EZRA'S HEART

BEFORE THIS GROUP OF EXILES SET OUT TO RETURN TO JERUSALEM, THEY SOUGHT THE LORD THROUGH FASTING. WHAT A GREAT EXAMPLE FOR US. CONSIDER THAT THEY ALREADY HAD THE LORD'S BACKING, THE KING'S BACKING AND THE PEOPLE AND RESOURCES READY TO GO, BUT THEY PAUSE TO HONOR GOD AND PREPARE THEIR HEARTS FOR THIS JOURNEY. THEY DID NOT CONSIDER THEIR JOURNEY SOMETHING THAT WAS THEIR OWN DOING OR THAT THEY WANTED TO CASUALLY APPROACH.

WE ALSO SEE EZRA'S HEART TO SHOW IN PRACTICE THAT THEY TRUSTED IN A POWERFUL GOD. APPARENTLY THERE WERE CERTAIN THINGS TO BE WORRIED OR SCARED OF - HAVING ROYAL TROOPS AS AN ESCORT WOULD HAVE BEEN HELPFUL! BUT EZRA DID NOT WANT TO DECLARE THE POWER AND MIGHT AND EXISTENCE OF A GREAT GOD OF ISRAEL AND THEN FALL BACK ON "HUMAN STRENGTH" TO CARE FOR THE PEOPLE. THOUGH FEAR MAY HAVE BEEN PRESENT - HE WAS FILLED WITH FAITH AND REALLY WANTED TO TRUST GOD.

WE CLAIM TO SERVE A RISEN SAVIOR AND A POWERFUL GOD. BUT DO OUR ACTIONS SPEAK TO THE FACT THAT WE REALLY BELIEVE THIS OR ARE THEY JUST WORDS? JAMES TELLS US THAT "FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD." DO WE SAY WE BELIEVE GOD CAN HEAL BUT ONLY SEEK HUMAN HELP AND NEVER PRAY TO BE HEALED? DO WE SAY GOD IS OUR PROVIDER YET WORK OURSELVES TO A POINT OF ANXIETY OR EXHAUSTION OR NOT GIVE OF OUR MONEY TO THE LORD'S CHURCH OR WORK? DO WE SAY GOD IS FAITHFUL AND BELIEVE HIS WORD WILL COME TO PASS BUT THEN FEAR WHEN WE SEE THINGS IN THE WORLD GOING AWRY? YOU SEE THESE AND COUNTLESS OTHER EXAMPLES AND SITUATIONS ARE THE MOMENTS WHERE WE REALLY SHOW THAT WE HAVE FAITH. YOU CAN'T "SEE" FAITH, BUT YOU CAN SEE A PERSON OF FAITH LIVING IN LIGHT OF WHAT THEY SUPPOSEDLY BELIEVE.

EZRA BELIEVES GOD IS CALLING HIM AND WILL PROTECT HIM AND SO HE IS ACTING LIKE IT BY NOT REQUESTING THE KING'S TROOPS. HE PUT HIS FAITH INTO ACTION, WHICH IS THE ONLY WAY FAITH REALLY MAKES SENSE.

EZRA 8:24-30 - RESOURCE ACCOUNTING

EZRA 8:31-36 - ARRIVAL AND SACRIFICING AT LAST

THE PEOPLE FINALLY ARRIVE AFTER A NEARLY 4 MONTH, 900 MILE JOURNEY. AFTER A 3 DAY REST AND RECHARGE THEY IMMEDIATELY BEGIN SACRIFICING TO THE LORD IN HIS TEMPLE. AND SO BEGINS EZRA'S TIME IN JERUSALEM. HE WAS SENT BY GOD TO TEACH AND INSTRUCT THE NATION IN THE WAYS OF THE LORD AND AS WE READ ON WE WILL LEARN HOW IT WILL UNFOLD.

LUNCH SIGN UP