

NOON BIBLE STUDY: EZRA 2

EZRA 2:1 - PURPOSE OF CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 2 HIGHLIGHTS THE PEOPLE WHO RETURNED TO JERUSALEM FROM BABYLON.

BEFORE WE DIVE IN TO THIS EXCITING CHAPTER, LET'S FIRST THINK ABOUT A FEW THINGS WHICH MAY BE HELPFUL AS WE READ. HERE ARE A FEW THINGS I ENDEAVOR TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN READING BIBLICAL SECTIONS WHICH HAVE LONG GENEALOGIES OR LISTINGS OF ITEMS.

- 1 - DO I RECOGNIZE ANYONE?
- 2 - DO I RECOGNIZE ANYTHING?
- 3 - TRY AND PICTURE ITEMS/THINGS/PLACES DESCRIBED
- 4 - KEEP AN EYE ON CROSS-REFERENCES

EZRA 2:2 - THE LEADERS

ZERUBBABEL WILL BE ONE OF TWO MAIN CHARACTERS IN OUR STORY AT THE BEGINNING OF EZRA. HE IS THE GOVERNMENTAL LEADER OF THE RETURNING PEOPLE. JESHUA IS THE OTHER MAIN CHARACTER. HE IS THE HIGH PRIEST AND WILL SERVE AS THE RELIGIOUS LEADER OF THE PEOPLE. ZERUBBABEL'S NAME MEANS "BEGOTTEN IN BABYLON" AND JESHUA IS THE SAME NAME AS JOSHUA AND OUR ENGLISH EQUIVALENT OF "JESUS" WHICH MEANS "YAHWEH IS SALVATION". HOW APPROPRIATELY THESE TWO MEN ARE NAMED FOR THIS TIME.

OTHER FAMILIAR NAMES IN THIS VERSE ARE NOT WHO YOU MIGHT THINK THEY ARE. NEHEMIAH LISTED HERE IS NOT THE NEHEMIAH OF THE BOOK OF NEHEMIAH AND MORDECAI IS NOT THE MORDECAI RELATED TO QUEEN ESTHER. WE KNOW THIS MOSTLY BECAUSE OF THE DATING OF THE RETURN TO JERUSALEM VERSUS THE LATER TIME WHEN THE MORE FAMOUS NEHEMIAH AND MORDECAI LIVED.

EZRA 2:3-35 - THE PEOPLE WHO RETURN

EZRA 2:36-42 - THE PRIESTS & LEVITES WHO RETURN

EZRA 2:43-58 - ADDITIONAL TEMPLE OFFICIALS & SERVANTS

V. 43-54 - THE TEMPLE SERVANTS: THE PHRASE "TEMPLE SERVANTS" IS FROM A HEBREW WORD THAT PREDOMINANTLY ONLY APPEARS IN EZRA & NEHEMIAH. THEY ARE APPARENTLY ANOTHER BRANCH OF TEMPLE WORKERS, BUT NOT PRIESTS OR LEVITES. EZRA 8:20 DESCRIBES THEM THE FOLLOWING WAY:

EZRA 8:20 (NLT) - THE TEMPLE SERVANTS WERE ASSISTANTS TO THE LEVITES-- A GROUP OF TEMPLE WORKERS FIRST INSTITUTED BY KING DAVID AND HIS OFFICIALS.

V. 55—58 - THE SONS OF SOLOMON'S SERVANTS: THIS DESIGNATION "MAY BE CONNECTED WITH FOREIGNERS WHOM SOLOMON ORIGINALLY DRAFTED FOR BUILDING THE TEMPLE (1 KINGS 9:20—21). THEY ARE NUMBERED HERE ALONG WITH THE TEMPLE SERVANTS, AND LIKE THEM ARE NOT REGARDED AS SLAVES. PRESUMABLY THEY ALL RETURNED VOLUNTARILY FROM BABYLON. (ESV STUDY BIBLE, EZRA 2:55-58)

I LOVE THAT IN THE CHRONICLING OF THE PEOPLE RETURNING THERE IS A NOTABLE INCLUSION OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO WERE GOING TO HELP RE-ESTABLISH THE PROPER WORSHIP OF THE LORD. FROM PRIESTS TO LEVITES TO SINGERS, THIS CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS NOT JUST PEOPLE RETURNING TO THEIR ANCESTRAL HOMELAND, BUT PEOPLE RETURNING TO THEIR LAND TO RETURN TO WORSHIPPING THEIR GOD.

THIS REMINDS US OF THE REASON FOR THEIR RETURN FROM EXILE AND ORIGINAL RESCUE FROM SLAVERY:

EXODUS 7:16 - "YOU (MOSES) SHALL SAY TO HIM (PHAROAH), 'THE LORD, THE GOD OF THE HEBREWS, SENT ME TO YOU, SAYING, "LET MY PEOPLE GO, THAT THEY MAY SERVE ME IN THE WILDERNESS. BUT BEHOLD, YOU HAVE NOT LISTENED UNTIL NOW."

IT'S A NEW DAY AND A NEW CHANCE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE TO LIVE FOR HIM AFTER A SEASON OF TRIAL. WE WILL SEE HOW IT GOES IN THE CHAPTERS THAT FOLLOW.

EZRA 2:59-63 - WHO'S WHO? (WITH NO ANCESTRY.COM TO HELP)

THIS GIVES US SOME INSIGHT INTO THE REAL LIFE CHALLENGES THAT WOULD BE FACED BY A PEOPLE EXPELLED FROM THEIR LAND FOR 70 YEARS. CERTAINLY IN THE BABYLONIAN SIEGE MANY PEOPLE DIED AND RECORDS WERE DESTROYED.

"THIS SECTION CONSIDERS THE LEGITIMACY OF CLAIMS TO CITIZENSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP IN THE PRIESTHOOD. WHETHER THEY BELONGED TO ISRAEL. IT WAS IMPORTANT IN THIS RETURNING COMMUNITY TO ESTABLISH CREDENTIALS. PEOPLE WERE COMING BACK AFTER A LONG EXILE TO CLAIM INHERITANCE AND PROPERTY. IN THE CASE OF PRIESTS, IT WAS PARAMOUNT THAT ONLY THOSE WITH THE CORRECT PEDIGREE SHOULD OFFICIATE AT THE ALTAR. SUCH CLAIMS NEEDED EVIDENCE, AND THE RECORD INEVITABLY CONTAINED GAPS. THE CLAIMS ENTERED HERE ARE NOT PERMANENTLY REFUSED, BUT HELD OVER, PENDING FURTHER INQUIRY." (ESV STUDY BIBLE, EZRA 2:59)

THE URIM AND THE THUMMIM WERE THE SPECIAL, SACRED AND SPIRITUAL ELEMENTS THAT THE HIGH PRIEST WAS INSTRUCTED TO USE TO MAKE DECISIONS AT VARIOUS TIMES. ONE WOULD HAVE THE ANSWER OF "NO" AND THE OTHER "YES" AND GOD PROMISED TO USE THESE ITEMS TO GIVE ANSWERS THROUGH THE HIGH PRIEST. IT WAS NOT GAMBLING OR WITCHCRAFT - IT WAS AN ORDAINED WAY THE LORD WOULD SPEAK TO THE NATION. THE PEOPLE WOULD WAIT FOR THE URIM AND THUMMIM TO BE RECONSTRUCTED BEFORE AN ANSWER TO THIS ANCESTRY QUESTION WOULD BE GIVEN. (YOU CAN READ MORE ABOUT URIM AND THUMMIM IN EXODUS 28)

EZRA 2:64-67 - SUMMARY & TOTALS

42,360 TOTAL CITIZENS

7,337 SERVANTS

200 SINGERS

736 HORSES, 245 MULES, 435 CAMELS, 6,720 DONKEYS

EZRA 2:68-70 - ARRIVING AT JERUSALEM

EZRA 2:69 (NLT) - AND EACH LEADER GAVE AS MUCH AS HE COULD. THE TOTAL OF THEIR GIFTS CAME TO 61,000 GOLD COINS, 6,250 POUNDS OF SILVER, AND 100 ROBES FOR THE PRIESTS.

61,000 DARICS OF GOLD = ABOUT 1,100 POUNDS IN WEIGHT.

5,000 MINAS = OVER 6000 POUNDS OF SILVER

THIS INITIAL ACT OF THE RETURNING LEADERS IS VERY TELLING. THEY APPEAR EAGER AND ZEALOUS TO GET THE TEMPLE BACK IN ORDER. THEY DON'T HOARD THE RESOURCES (THAT THEY LIKELY RECEIVED FROM THE PERSIAN PEOPLE AS THEY LEFT) BUT PUT THEM *IMMEDIATELY* TO THE WORK OF GOD'S HOUSE. THE TEXT INDICATED THEY "OFFERED WILLINGLY" FOR THE HOUSE OF GOD (V. 68). THEY ARE READY TO LEAVE THEIR OLD LIVES BEHIND AND BEGIN AGAIN IN JERUSALEM. SUCH ZEAL AND PRACTICAL EVIDENCE OF IT IS GLORIOUS!

WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY THAT DUE TO CORRUPTION AND SINFUL PEOPLE, THE PEOPLE OF GOD AT TIMES ARE HESITANT TO "OFFER WILLINGLY" FOR GOD'S WORK. WE THINK ABOUT HOW CHURCHES HAVE MISMANAGED MONEY AND SUPPORTED HYPOCRITICAL LEADERS AND THEIR LAVISH (AND DISGUSTING) LIFESTYLES. WE WONDER IF WE GIVE TO MISSIONARIES WHETHER OR NOT THEY WILL TAKE THE MONEY FOR THEMSELVES. WE HESITATE TO GIVE TO RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS BECAUSE WE'RE UNSURE IF THE PEOPLE WHO "REALLY NEED THE MONEY" WILL GET IT. WE LOOK AT THE SIGN-HOLDING PERSON ON THE STREET CORNER AND ASSUME OUR POCKET CHANGE WILL BE USED FOR NEFARIOUS THINGS. AND THEN OF COURSE IF WE GIVE IN A SACRIFICIAL WAY, WILL WE HAVE ENOUGH TO PROVIDE FOR OUR OWN NEEDS? THESE ARE REAL AND REASONABLE QUANDARIES.

BUT THE CASUALTY OF THESE DOUBTS, WHETHER FOUNDED OR NOT, IS THE PEOPLE OF GOD'S ZEAL TO "OFFER WILLINGLY" GETS QUENCHED. WE TALK OURSELVES OUT OF GIVING GENEROUSLY AND SIT AND WAIT FOR A PERFECT SCENARIO...ONE WHICH DOES NOT ALWAYS COME. I POINT THESE REALITIES OUT NOT TO ENCOURAGE FOOLISHNESS OR WASTEFULNESS - BUT TO GET EACH OF US, (MYSELF SURELY INCLUDED) TO THINK. TO THINK ABOUT OUR HEART TOWARDS GIVING AND CONTRIBUTING TO THE WORK GOD IS DOING ON THE EARTH THROUGH PEOPLE AND CHURCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS. AND TO THINK ABOUT THE LEVEL WE ARE AT ON THE "OFFERED WILLINGLY" SCALE.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS: MOST BIBLE READERS WOULD AGREE THAT CHAPTERS LIKE EZRA 2 ARE TOUGH. NAMES AND NUMBERS, PEOPLE AND PLACES CAN MAKE A TEXT WHICH IS ALREADY DIFFICULT SEEM NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE. ONE MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO SKIP OVER CHAPTERS LIKE THIS AND GET TO THE "GOOD STUFF" AND THE STORIES. COMMANDS AND POEMS AND EPICS AND MIRACLES ARE MUCH MORE ENJOYABLE TO READ. WE CAN HARDLY PRONOUNCE THE NAMES, WE DON'T ALWAYS SEE THE CONNECTION OF THESE NAMES TO THE BIGGER BIBLICAL STORY.

WHO WERE THE SONS OF AZGAD MENTIONED OF EZRA 2:12? WHO WAS THE TEMPLE SERVANT NAMED HASUPHA MENTIONED IN VERSE 43? WHY DOES POCHERETH-HAZZABAIM (V. 57) HAVE SUCH A LONG NAME? WHY COULDN'T WE JUST CALL HIM PO-HAZZ? WHY KEEP TRACK OF WHO WAS THE SON OF THIS ONE OR THAT ONE? WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE THAT SO AND SO LIVED IN SUCH AND SUCH? THESE ARE REASONABLE QUESTIONS TO ASK. AND I DON'T KNOW ALL OF THE INS AND OUTS OR ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS.

BUT HERE IS WHAT I DO KNOW. GENEALOGIES AND CENSUS DATA ARE IMPORTANT TO GOD BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE IMPORTANT TO GOD. HE INCLUDES THESE NAMES BECAUSE THEY REPRESENT LIVES AND FAMILIES THAT HE HAS TAKEN NOTE OF, AND HAS ENSURED THEY ARE PRESERVED SO WE CAN TAKE NOTE OF THEM TOO. THESE NAMES ARE IMPORTANT BECAUSE THESE PEOPLE ARE IMPORTANT - AND THEIR PRESENCE IN THE TEXT CAN BE SOMETHING WE SKIP OVER TO GET TO THE "GOOD PART" OR WE CAN CONSIDER THAT THEIR NAMES - HARD AS THEY ARE TO READ AND SAY - SPEAK TO THE FACT THAT THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE KNOWS AND CARES ABOUT EACH PERSON. THAT'S PRETTY NEAT. AND THAT MAKES EZRA 2 PRETTY NEAT TOO!

NO NEXT 2 WEEKS