

Ezra 2-3

In our last gathering in the book of Ezra a couple weeks ago we witness the captives released, sent back by king Cyrus restore Jerusalem, and rebuild their temple. He'd been commanded by the Lord to have the temple built, you recall that Isaiah had prophesied of him and written *about* him some 150 yrs before he was even on the scene. And now that the Medo-Persian empire had come to power, and the Babylonian empire had fallen Cyrus made the proclamation that the people who'd been taken captive were free to return to their homeland.

Now they didn't *have* to go, but they were *free* to go, and that's critical, because we remember that there was really no reason in the practical sense that *any* of them would return. Why? Because they had it pretty good materially/economically right where they were at, but the problem wasn't one that was practical, but rather it was one that was spiritual. Jerusalem was the only place that God had ordained that they could make their sacrifices unto Him, it was the only place He'd put His name, and so the reason that anyone would return wouldn't be because of the personal prosperity that was awaiting them, the city lie in ruins, much of it literally burnt to the ground and demolished. But rather because they wanted to *draw near* to God, *be pleasing* to God, and *walk in obedience* to God, there was nothing of this world that could allure them to do what they did, it more or less had to be out of a personal, passionate pursuit of God.

And that's what God desires of us, that we draw near to Him *not* out of legal constraint, or because we think there's anything in it for us in the sense of selfish worldly gain, but rather because we love Him, because we just want to draw near to Him, walk in obedience to Him, being as it were *pleasing* to Him. Pressing towards Him out of a personal passionate pursuit of Him, it was a 900-mile journey that these people had to make to get from where they were back to Jerusalem. And it's not like they hopped on a 747 and was there in a few hours, it was about a 4 month trek over some not so simple terrain. And don't you know that when you draw near to God, and have wholly committed yourself to seeking Him, serving Him, living your life in a manner that's pleasing to Him, that He honors those things. He forgets nothing that you do for His name's sake, as a matter of fact He keeps record of everything you do, I don't know if you realize it or not but God is a bookkeeper, He has a book of remembrance. We read in Mal 3:16 "*Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name.*" So if you fear the Lord, speak to others about Him and meditate on His name, He's got you logged in His book of remembrance. And I hope there's several volumes dedicated to your name, rather than a little pamphlet type thing. Rev 20:12 "*And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.*" Your life goes on record in heaven, the things you do motivated by the love and grace of Jesus Christ Paul said will become gold, silver, precious stones, everything else, as it's tried as by fire will be as wood, hay and stubble it'll go up in smoke.

But the point I'm wanting you to perceive is that when you seek the Lord, and serve the Lord out of love *for* the Lord, He doesn't forget that. As a matter of fact He pays very detailed attention to that and keeps record *of* that, and that's what we have going on in ch 2, sort of a sample of the records that God keeps. These people were wanting to walk in a way that was pleasing *to* the Lord, they were pursuing *after* the Lord, they did what they did for the glory *of* the Lord and what did God do? He remembered it and recorded it so that even to this day we're reading of their commitment to, and pursuit of, the Lord.

Vs1-2

And then it goes on for another 59-60 vs for a thorough work out in linguistic gymnastics that if anyone would volunteer to read out loud for us we'd be glad to listen in... But real quick what we have here in this 2nd vs is a list of some of the overseers that made the pilgrimage back to Jerusalem along with the rest of them. Now this *isn't* the same Nehemiah as in the book of Nehemiah, he won't be along for another 90yrs or so, neither is this the same Mordecai as found in the book of Esther who won't be on the scene for another 60 yrs or so. But Zerubbabel you find was of the house of David and if they'd have continued on with the kings (which they didn't) he'd have been the guy who at this time would've been on the throne. We read in Matt ch 1 with regards to the lineage of Jesus, "*Josiah begot Jeconiah and his brothers about the time they were carried away to Babylon. And after they were brought to Babylon, Jeconiah begot Shealtiel, and Shealtiel begot Zerubbabel.*" Matt 1:11-12 So he was of the lineage of Josiah who brought about radical reform in Israel in his day, and had they carried on with kings, he'd have been on the throne now. However the days of the kings of Israel would be and are over until the day that Jesus Christ takes the throne and then the promise will be fulfilled which God gave to David saying your house and your throne shall be established forever. But Zerubbabel will take on the position now more so of the governor of the land as opposed to a king and he'll oversee the work of rebuilding the temple along with Jeshua also known as Joshua the high priest in the books of Haggai and Zechariah who were the prophets who would be on the scene during this particular time period and then Malachi would be in the not too distant future.

But we find represented in this list common people in vs 3-35, priests vs 36-39, Levites vs 40, praise leaders vs 41, porters, or gatekeepers vs 42, now in vs 43 you read of the Nethinim, who were the Nethinim? The common thought there is that perhaps you remember when they were coming into Promised Land and Joshua was cleaning house everywhere he went and fear was struck into the hearts of the inhabitants of the land? Well, there was the one incident where the Gibeonites who were just over the next ridge heard that they were coming and that they weren't making a covenant with anyone in the land. And so they saddled up some riders, put old ratty clothes on them, gave them moldy bread, tattered shoes and all the rest, old ridged wineskins, and they went to Joshua and said, "We've come from a far country, and we've heard all about you and want to make a covenant of peace with you." Joshua said, "How do I know that you're being honest with me?"

They said, “See these clothes, brand new the day we headed out for you, this bread was still warm in our hands and now it’s all moldy...” And on down the list they went, well Joshua made a mistake that day, instead of inquiring of the Lord as to the legitimacy of their story, he just said, “Well, alright we’ll live in peace with you.” And he made a covenant with them, 3 days later they discovered that they were their next-door neighbors, and what Joshua did was instead of wiping them out, because he’d made a covenant with them he made them forced laborers for the children of Israel. And they were such good workers they wound up serving in various aspects of temple service and all the rest. Well, all that to say that when you read of these Nethinim it’s believed that the reference is to the Gibeonites who became Israel’s servants.

One other thing I didn’t point out to you was back in vs 23 where it says, “The men of Anathoth.” You can read in Jeremiah 32 where God had him buy a field in Anathoth just before Judah went into captivity (which would seem like a bad investment). But he instructed him to give the deed to a particular fella and say to him by the word of the Lord that houses and fields and vineyards would be possessed in that land again.

Which translated means, “You’re going into captivity but God will bring us back and when He does this deed will verify that this area of land belongs to you.” God was confirming to them that the captivity was temporary and that He’d bring them back, and now here we read of the men of Anathoth coming back into the land just like Jeremiah said.

Vs 55 we read of the sons of Solomon’s servants, and then in vs 59-61 we read of this group of people who weren’t able to identify their father’s house or their genealogy which is to say some of them lost their records, and some of them were of the priesthood, and so we read in

vs 62-63

The Urim and the Thummim, what were they? No one knows, you’ll hear different things, the fact is, no one knows for sure, but somehow, be it by lots, lights, or whatever (Urim and Thummim means “Lights and perfections”) they would ascertain the will of God by this means, they would be worn in the breastplate of the high priest and he was to bear the judgment of the children of Israel on his heart before the Lord when he went into the presence of the Lord. But we don’t really know what they were, or how they worked. One thing I know they were’t was magic glasses that allowed Joseph Smith to read the hieroglyphics on a couple golden tablets he found whereby the Mormon Church came into existence, so though I don’t know what they were, I’m positive of the one thing they were not. At that time when Moses was around, glass hadn’t even been invented yet, so they couldn’t have been glasses.

But the application I want to draw out of this is that you need to know that you know to whom you belong, there should be nothing ambiguous about your spiritual genealogy, whose house you’re of, who your Father is. It’s not a “think so” salvation that we’re apart of, but a “know so” salvation. And if you’re not sure of you’re lineage, and whose family you’re apart of, you need to make certain of that.

The Holy Spirit should be bearing witness with your spirit that you're a child of God, and if you don't have that witness, get on your face before God and seek it out. Also the bible says that by this we know we've passed from death to life, that we have love for the brethren, what's your attitude towards Christians in general, do you really love the body of Christ? I'm not asking if you're a "people person" but what's your heart towards believers specifically? "Well if I'm not certain about that witness am I not saved?" That's not for me to determine, our great High Priest, Jesus Christ when He appears will make it known, the bible tells us, "*The Lord knows those who are His*," 2 Tim 2:19 I'm just encouraging you to do what you need to do to ensure that *you know* that you're His, because I'd hate for you to go through life on a false hope resting on something other than what the word of God teaches and then hear from the Lord on that day, "Depart from Me I never knew you." And that's the key, knowing Jesus Christ having a personal relationship with Him, taking Him into your heart and into your life, having received Him by faith.

Vs64-67

So nearly 50,000 people in all, really not too many considering there were millions in captivity, narrow is the path and difficult is the way that leads to eternal life and there are few who find it. I'm not saying that everyone who stayed in the place of their captivity was lost in the practical sense, but the principle is there. There were only a few in the big picture that made it back by way of comparison, but we note even their animals were recorded, what's my point? That as I said, practically this portion may not mean a whole lot to us, but personally, and principally it speaks volumes, because it tells us that God keeps a very detailed record of what's going on in the lives of those who are in love with Him, seeking after Him, and desiring to be led *by* Him.

God both remembers and keeps record of the things that you do for His names sake down to the most minute of details. Heb 6:10 tells us, "...*God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name*," and this is just one example of many found in the bible of various lists of names and things that people have done for the glory of God. You may never bring to mind one of these people, but God knows them all by name, and the same holds true for you.

Vs68-70

Notice that there people from every tribe that came back into the land, no mention of 10 lost tribes or any of that, they're all accounted for. And then once again we see the principle of the people of God providing for the work of God, and what they gave they gave according to their ability, and they gave of their own free will. The book of Cor puts it like this in regards to the giving of our offerings, "*On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper*," 1 Cor 16:2 The key there being, "...as he may prosper" which correlates with the phrase in vs 69, "According to their ability." Some people go beyond that, some people give nowhere near their ability. Of course in his 2nd epistle to the Corinthians he spoke of the fact that God loves a cheerful giver, one who gives not out of constraint or guilt, but out of the overflow of his love for God, willingly.

God just loves when we give to Him willingly but He hates it when we give to Him grudgingly. But it's biblical that the people of God provide for the various projects of God. People will at times ask me why we never do various church fundraisers, and this is it. Because biblically God uses His people to provide for His projects. There in 3rd John he speaks to Gaius and commends him for his generosity, and he says that he does well to send a couple fellas on their way with what they need, he says, "...because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles." 3 John 7 Which is to say they didn't look to the world to support the work of the Lord, and that's only right. And here the people were excited about what God was doing so they gave liberally, and of their own free will.

Ch 3

Vs1-7

Few things here, #1 right off the bat there in vs 1 we need to draw attention to that phrase, "...the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem." There was a oneness, a unity of spirit and like-mindedness about them, and when it comes to ministry, and worship, it's so critical that the people be of one mind, one spirit, one heart in the Lord. Why because God hates disunity, division, and discord, the bible exhorts us, "...walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Eph 4:1-3 We spoke briefly last Wednesday in our prayer service of the unique anointing that there is in unity among the corporate gathering of the body of Christ. Remember, "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing --Life forevermore." Ps 133 How the Holy Spirit blesses unity in the body of Christ, here they gathered in unity, as one man to Jerusalem.*

The 2nd thing I want to draw your attention to is there in vs 2 and again in vs 4 beginning to surface here as a pattern and it's the phrase, "...as it is written." There was no, "Well, I think this." Or "How about we try that?" There was no debating about the ministry, what they did, or how they were to do it, when they found it written in the word of God, that settled it. They did what they did, "...as it is written." In other words they're returning to the word of God, a few weeks ago we spoke of how revival and the Word of God go hand in hand, and this is the same way we're to be doing ministry today, as it is written. God's word instructs us as to the way we're to do God's work, there's no ifs ands, or buts.

And we notice that they did what they did though fear had come upon them. And the idea there is that they realized that they were in desperate need of God's divine intervention and protection if they were to succeed in the work. So they were doing what they needed to do to be right with God even *though*, and (if I may) especially *because* they were afraid.

God had promised them protection if they obeyed His word, and so they're doing just that, they built the altar exactly like the word of God said, they're offering burnt offerings on it (which of course point to Christ) exactly like the word of God said, and these are things we like to see. Would to God that we would always do what we do, exactly as the word of God said, right now things are going well for them.

Now there in vs 4 we notice they also kept the Feast of Tabernacles, (as it is written) vs 1 tells us it was the 7th month, right around our October, and they kept 3 holiday type ordeals in the 7th month of the year and it was a holy season which is why they'd gather together in Jerusalem for the 7th month. The 1st day was the feast of trumpets, 9 days later came the Day of Atonement on which a sacrifice would be made for the entire nation, and then from the 15th to the 22nd day was the feast of tabernacles that we're reading of here. And it memorialized the wilderness wanderings and God's faithfulness to bring them into the Promise Land from Egypt and for the whole week they'd camp out in these little lean-tos that they made and they'd look up at the stars and speak to their kids of their heritage and it was just a neat time for the whole family. But again the emphasis here is upon, "as it is written," they were just following suit with the word of God.

We see once again in vs 5 more sacrifices of the freewill offering, now look at vs 6 (read). In other words they began holding worship services at the temple site even though it wasn't technically ready to be used. Just as soon as they could they started worshipping the Lord right there where the temple was to be built (which is what we'll be doing in our new building here in just a couple weeks). But we want to note the fact that they didn't build the place so they could begin to worship, they were already worshipers and out of the overflow of that, the place was built. So many people thing you've got to have a church to worship in, the fact is we're to be worshipers *that's why* we construct a building to meet in. Then again they gave money to the various contractors to get the supplies on route to the site. (Kind of a cool place to be in light of where we're at as a body isn't it?)

Vs8-11

So 7 months later the work begins, and Zerubbabel appointed Levites 20yrs old and older to oversee the construction, make sure things were done right and all the rest. Originally they were to be 30 but David made an amendment to that and reduced it to 20, so it's kind of neat to see these young guys in leadership positions overseeing various aspects of the work.

And when the foundation was laid, there was a radical celebration, much like when David had the ark transported to Jerusalem. But we note the fact that it was a time of praise, a time of thanksgiving, for God's goodness, and His mercy which endures forever. There's something about God's mercy and goodness, and the rebuilding of that which was in ruins that go hand in hand. You know what I mean? I think of each of us as a temple, and how we at one time lay in ruins, and yet in the mercy and goodness of God the foundation of Jesus Christ was laid in our lives and what a joyous experience indeed.

But things are happening exactly as God said they would, we read in Jer 33 *“Thus says the LORD: ‘Again there shall be heard in this place -- of which you say, “It is desolate, without man and without beast” -- in the cities of Judah, in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say: “Praise the LORD of hosts, For the LORD is good, For His mercy endures forever” --and of those who will bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause the captives of the land to return as at the first,’ says the LORD.”* Jer 33:10-11

So in the goodness, and mercy of God we see renewing, rebuilding, and restoration.

Vs12-13

Now it had been 70 yrs since Nebuchadnezzar had taken the 1st group of people from Judah captive, but it had only been 50yrs since the final destruction of the Temple. So there were still some old-timers around who’d seen Solomon’s temple. And they were all weeping and wailing, “This is nothing like the old days, I can’t believe this is what’s become of our glorious temple. The old temple was glorious, full of gold and silver...” And all the rest, the young guys were elated, on fire, excited about what God was doing, the old timers became like old wineskins, listen. There’s a real snare in getting caught up in the glory days of the yesteryears. God is always moving, always doing something fresh and new, and so a word to those who’ve been around for awhile in the Lord, 10, 12, 14 yrs in the Lord, 30-40 yrs in the Lord. Be careful about stifling what God wants to do today by trying to compare it to the “great days” of the past. Let God do what God’s going to do, and instead of going against the grain of it, get behind it and on board with it. This really started to bum Zerubbabel and Jeshua out, so the word of the Lord came to them, turn to Haggai Ch 2 (Vs1-9).

God says, “Don’t be discouraged by their whooping and hollering, I am with you, and the glory of this latter Temple will by far exceed the glory of the former.” God is in the business of transforming our lives from glory to greater glory, and He’s always wanting to do greater things with your life. But how did the glory of this temple out weigh the glory of the former? The key is there in vs 7 (read)

The phrase, “The Desire of all nations” is a direct reference to none other than Jesus Christ Himself who would be dedicated in this temple, who at the age of 12 would be about His Father’s business in this temple, who would teach the people in this temple, the glory of the latter would by far exceed the glory of the former. So don’t be discouraged when someone is unable to breakthrough the mold of tradition and yesteryears with regard to what God wants to do in your life. Be strong, for He is with you, His Spirit remains among you, and He will take you from glory to greater glory as by the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Prayer Points: Lord cause us to be on fire as by Your Spirit, and excited about the work that You're both doing, and want to do in our lives. We thank You for the renewing, rebuilding, restoring work that comes to us in your goodness and mercy. God help us to do your work, your way, as it is written in Your word. And help us God to be of one accord, of like mindedness, that Your Spirit might move in great and awesome ways in our midst (Acts 2). And Lord we thank You that nothing we do in Your name escapes Your attention and we thank You most of all that our name has been written not only in Your book of remembrance, but in Your book of Life, and we give you praise, in Jesus name.