

## Hurst Green

19<sup>th</sup> May 19

### Ezra 2

#### What is in a list of names?

Well this chapter is high up on my list of chapters to gloss over!!

It has some unique names for your babies that will keep people struggling over how to pronounce them. There are 125 of them including:

- Adonikam
- Gibbar
- Asaph
- Hasupha
- Gazzam

The list goes on. Other than that why is this here? There has to be more to it than a very awkward reading for anyone.

All scripture is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16). That does not mention naming children and so there has to be more to this fascinating list.

Scholars have laboured long and hard over this and come up with all sorts of erudite reasons but the main one has to be found in the edict of Cyrus that we looked at two weeks ago when we looked at the providence of God in fulfilling his promises.

He said they would return after 70 years and he made sure they did. In his usual way he went beyond the basic promise for God loves to lavish us with his gifts.

- With his love in 1 John 3:1
- His grace Eph 1:6 bestowed with wisdom and understanding – you cannot claim that you do not understand
- The gospel
- And many other things not least each other and our fellowship here.

For the Israelites he lavished them with great wealth that their neighbours freely gave them (chapter 1:6)

But the important part is in Cyrus' decree

#### ***Ezra 1:3 (ANIV)***

<sup>3</sup> *Anyone of his people among you—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem.*

To be free to go they had to show they were part of God's people. In the 70 years they had not just been assimilated but they had stayed distinct and could prove they were part of God's people and so were entitled to go and build the temple.

The genealogy may look like it is a social history lesson but the reason for this listing is religious not social. It shows they were entitled to worship the one true God as his chosen people, the Israelites. Remember this is the first of three returns:

- Rebuild the temple
- Re-establish true worship
- Re-establish the city

This will take them 22 years and then it will be another 30 before Ezra comes.

But there are some fascinating things to be discovered in the lists from Chapter 2. We know this does not account for all the Israelites because some will come on the next two returns but this is the return of those who identified themselves as Israelites and wanted to return from a richer country to one desecrated by war and laid to waste.

Now at this point you have probably decided that I have too much time on my hands if I can get excited by this list of names!!

Like all genealogies in the bible they have purposes and things to teach us so we are allowed to get excited by them.

So some facts:

- That list in verse 2 makes up twelve heads of tribes (actually its 11 but include Sheshbazzar from chapter 1 verse 11 and you have 12). You know of course that Israel had twelve tribes but the lineage to them has fallen away.

Later in Matthew of course the lineage of Jesus is taken all the way back to Abraham and in Luke it is taken back to Adam – each of those teaches us different things which I have covered in Christmases past (and that should not conjure up the image of Dickens Ghost from Christmas past from the Christmas carol in which ever version is your favourite – mine has to be the muppets!!)

- Down in verses 36 to 39 we have the priests. 10% of the total which seems a large percentage but of course the priests would return. Then it was a clan thing and what could priests do in Babylon? They had no temple but here was their opportunity to lead worship again in the place where there should be a temple to the living God
- In verse 65 they had 200 singers. When this temple was ready they were going to be ready with the choir – 200 strong. Music has always formed a key part of worship although we must always remember that it is not the whole of worship. But 200 of them made that journey to spend 22 years rebuilding a temple for them to praise the living God.
- In verse 60 there were 652 who could not show they were descended from Israel but they were going anyway to worship the God they identified with. And in verse 61 a number of priests who could not prove their lineage but wanted to come anyway.

And there are more in verses 55-57. A list of people who came from peoples subdued by Solomon and now identifying with the one true God. They had realised the error of serving their Gods of metal and stone and came to be part of this worship band so they could praise the real God.

Now the lessons for us today – we have been freed from the rules of lineage etc and we do not have to prove our fathers because in the spiritual realm we know that we all have the same Father – the one true living God and there is only one generation!

### **But lesson1: God is faithful to his chosen people**

God had chosen Israel but in sending Jesus and releasing the new covenant God showed the truth behind the covenant. It was your spiritual standing that matters not your physical family.

Your ancestry matters but it is your spiritual ancestry that counts.

So here we go with those scriptures that show this.

We know that Israel got proud. By the time Jesus came they were confident that having Abraham as your father guaranteed you as part of the chosen people. Foreigners could get into the outer court but only Israelites could get right into the temple.

John the Baptist hit home on this one:

#### **Luke 3:8 (ANIV)**

<sup>8</sup> *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.*

And Jesus tells Nicodemus

#### **John 3:3 (ANIV)**

<sup>3</sup> *In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

That left Nicodemus confused and Jesus tried to explain it

#### **John 3:5-6 (ANIV)**

<sup>5</sup> *Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no-one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.*

Thus it is the evidence of our rebirth in the Spirit that shows we are part of God's chosen people. 2 Peter 1 gives the characteristics you should be adding to your faith and Galatians 5 shows you the fruit of the Spirit. These things are important and if you are not finding them you need to follow the advice of 2 Peter 1:10 and make your calling certain by making sure your name is written in the Lambs book of life. When they come to checking it on the final day it will be too late.

### **But lesson2: God is faithful to his chosen people so that they might live faithfully to his covenant.**

God's covenant is all important because God does not break his word.

God wants worshippers as he tells us in

#### **John 4:24 (ANIV)**

<sup>24</sup> *God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."*

But we worship not just here in Church; although that is important which is why we are commanded not to stop meeting together. But we worship in Spirit and in Truth in all of our lives.

Because living faithfully implies certain things that are vital to our Christian lives.

Firstly it implies that we live in **community** – our faith is not an island but is something we have to live out together.

Each of us is a temple of God but it is together that we are the body of Christ in this place. We are different but cooperate to make our worship work. Like all bodies we are, or we should be, growing in our faith.

And that come onto the second implication. We live with **commitment**.

This list of men and their families were giving up everything to walk about 1000 miles across a hostile desert to be part of the long work of building the temple. We have trouble getting to church on time but these people had commitment.

They were **committed to worship**.

They could not sing the Lord's song by the waters of Babylon (That's Psalm 137). They longed to get to the temple and sing the Lord's song in its rightful place.

They did this not for a warm and fuzzy feeling that all too often Churches see as the result of worship. Their aim in worship is to meet the living God and show his glory to the world.

That is a different form of worship – it uses the same tools but has a very different aim making worship about God and not about ourselves.

We should not be aiming to go home from this place feeling good because we have been here. We should go home having met with the living God. That will stir you up, it will probably make you feel uncomfortable but it will make you want to be part of something bigger.

It will make you want to give time, service and possessions to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. It will make you want to sacrifice but more of that later.

As they went they were **committed to service**.

This list shows us the various roles they were bringing back to Jerusalem. Bringing back for only that one purpose – to worship God. They would worship him with whatever talents they had and, as they were needed, they would learn new skills and find new ways to praise him.

Do you remember that verse I quoted two weeks ago

**Psalm 137:5-6 (ANIV)**

<sup>5</sup> *If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.* <sup>6</sup> *May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.*

For them serving this God was not a matter of duty and boring duty at that. This was service filled with excitement and service that they were committed to.

Do we rate our service up there as the highest joy we have. We should whatever the role we have and if it gives us that much joy we should seek out new roles not for the publicity they would give us but for the opportunity to serve because that is our highest joy. That is our worship of God – Just as you do it for the least of these you do it for me. (Matthew 25:40 and 45)

And finally they were **committed to giving**.

As these people went back they were committed to giving. Giving of their time and skills because this temple would not rebuild itself – it needed workmen and they had 49, 897. Whatever skill they had for the worship in the temple they had 26 years of building to do first.

They were going to give!

But look at verses 68 and 69. They were going to give again.

When they got to Jerusalem they gave freewill offerings to the new temple. Now freewill offerings go beyond your normal giving. We should all be giving to keep our Church going and to keep our Churches giving going. This week we received confirmation that last year's harvest offering had reached its destination and they are now waiting to buy the hospital beds. That was a freewill offering that went beyond our normal giving and is making a difference in one corner of Africa.

If you would like to see the difference they would love to welcome you and it would make a holiday with a difference and a very definite purpose – visits like that change lives and usually your life more than theirs!

Now in those verses you can ignore them because you do not understand the measurements so let me tell you:

- 500 Kg of Gold (about £17M)
- 2900 Kg of silver (about £1M)
- Those priestly garments were fine things in their own right full of precious materials.

They gave according to their ability but they gave as we are instructed to give

In accordance with our income (see 1 Cor 16:1-2) but in those verses note that it is from the top – when you receive your income; it is not what you have left at the end of the week after you have done all you want.

And it works the way the Macedonian churches gave in 2 Cor 8: 1-5. Out of what is described as their extreme poverty they gave not only as much as they were able but went beyond that in their earnest desire to give for God's work; to give that the Kingdom of heaven may touch earth again and again.

In verse 4 they are actually pleading for the privilege of being able to share in serving the saints.

When was the last time you pleaded for the privilege of giving?

We in the west are rich and can make a real difference with our wealth if we choose to or we can keep it for ourselves and our luxuries. That takes us straight back to Matthew 25 and Jesus on Judgement day – just as you did for the least of these you did it for me and verse 45 – just as you did not do it for the least of these you did not do it for me.

So this seemingly innocuous list of names ends up leaving us with some questions and lessons. Not surprising since God promised his word would not return empty (Isa 55:11) and it is all there for our teaching.

Firstly – Are you one of God's chosen ones; Are you sure that you are one of God's chosen ones. If you want to know ask one question (actually it is two wrapped up in one sentence). Have you truly put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and, importantly, is there evidence of that in your life?

Secondly - Are you living to God's covenant in your life? Do you have that commitment to worship, service and giving? Is there evidence of that in your life as you work as part of this fellowship? Do those around you see the difference that being a disciple of Jesus is making in you?

Two questions; two answers but they are probably the most significant questions you will ever ask yourself and you should be asking them regularly to ensure you do not slip away.

In 2 Peter 1 it says after listing the characteristics you should be adding to your faith

**2 Peter 1:10-11 (ANIV)**

<sup>10</sup> *Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall,* <sup>11</sup> *and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*