

When coming out of these seasons of what feels like exile, how we go forward matters. Daniel goes back to God's Word. It is what we must do - read God's Word and repent.

Ezra 2:1-2 *Now these are the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his city. These came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.*

These names matter. We tend to skip over them but... **2 Timothy 3:16** *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.* When we believe those words, then we want to find significance in each word. These names in Ezra have an impact on our lives. (A note: Mordecai and Nehemiah are not the familiar men we know of).

Today we overview **Ezra 2**.

1. These are significant names:

- Zerubbabel is from the lineage of King David and from the line of Judah. He is a King without a kingdom as Israel is in captivity. **Jeremiah 33:17** *For thus says the Lord, 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.'* Jeremiah was writing these words long before the exile. God had promised and would not allow the lineage to be broken. God is still faithful to redeem His promises to us even when we feel like we are in exile. God is a promise-keeper. Sometimes a season is very long and the promise becomes lost. Then we tend to question God's involvement. Zerubbabel reminds us that God is faithful to His promises.
- Jeshua was established as the High Priest from the lineage of the Levites to serve in the temple. **Jeremiah 33:18** *'and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to prepare sacrifices continually.'*

Jeremiah's words were written long before the exile as God gives a promise. These prophecies should show us that God is faithful even today. God is not done with our lives no matter the struggle we face. If you are in a place of difficulty today, know that God's faithfulness is toward us. Don't give up hope. God is not done with our lives. God will fulfill and finish the work that He began.

2. These were real names of real people in verse 2.

God redeems real people. God knows each one's name. God knows each one of us. The Lord disciplines for a purpose but it does not undo a promise. God still redeems people today. God has not forgotten Your name. God knows your name. God is faithful. God knows you and your circumstances. God knows our doubt and hesitation. God is not done with us.

3. Only a very small fraction of Jews returned.

Ezra 2:64 *The whole assembly numbered 42,360.* Do we go when God calls or do we look at our circumstances? They had a good life in exile, in Babylon, a comfortable life, yet still in bondage. When time came, only a few left to return and leave the comfortable life of exile. Only a very small remnant went when released to go back to Jerusalem. Most of the Jews valued comfort rather than worship so they didn't go. How often do we accept less than what is promised? The returning exiles were not returning to anything as all had been torn down. Work was waiting for them. Yet, God was calling them back to Jerusalem. Sometimes it is easier to stay than to go to hard places that require faith. These returning Jews...

- Showed their commitment to worship.

A small group went and they saw blessings. It was a step of faith and sacrifice to worship. The purpose of returning was to rebuild the temple - the place of God's presence. Their worship could not be good without that place. They were so motivated to worship and had a commitment to worship. Some of these people had not let the desire burn down while in captivity. They traveled one thousand miles on foot with their belongings and children. Imagine the effort and surrender to rebuild the temple. This worship superseded their feelings.

Where does worship stand in our own lives? How have we lost that yearning? If our worship is more about a feeling than a person, then question if it's worship. Worship is not for us - it is for God. What do we see as inconvenient to worship? They moved kids one thousand miles to get to church. Let's get our own kids in church as a priority. Those that didn't set it as a priority, showed their heart. What do we allow to get in the way of worship? What can we sacrifice to make worship priority?

- Showed their commitment to service.

Ezra 2:36, 40, 42, 43, 55, 70. The function of the temple required the involvement of the whole. Sometimes we think we don't have anything of value to add to service. Living in community makes our involvement and gifting noticeable. God has a purpose for each of us. Ezra listed groups of people and their purpose. **I Peter 4:10-11** *As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the multifaceted grace of God. Whoever speaks is to do so as one who is speaking actual words of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

I Peter talks about the gifting that is found in our lives. Everyone had a part of what was happening. We tend to think we don't have value to offer. Everyone should be doing something to be a part of community. Be a contributor to God's work. Isolation makes us think we don't have anything to offer. Giftings will become evident when we are around others. This requires that we work within community. Be a part of it not just in it. Past failure is not an excuse. Failure does not predict your future. God has a plan and a purpose. He is faithful to do as He promised. If you don't have a purpose, then get one. Be a contributor to what God is doing. Joy is found when we serve alongside one another. God can still use us and has a plan. He is faithful.

- It showed their commitment to giving.

Ezra 2:68-69 *Some of the heads of fathers' households, when they arrived at the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem, offered willingly for the house of God to erect it on its site. According to their ability they gave to the treasury for the work sixty-one thousand gold drachmas, five thousand silver minas, and a hundred priestly garments.*

According to their ability means they all gave in different amounts. Yet this chapter has many listings until here when it says "according to their own ability, they gave." This commitment cost them something. The first thing the people did upon returning was to go to the house of the Lord and offer their gifts. They gave according to their ability. They saw a need and they sacrificed. This is always attached to God's blessing in many ways. The amount of money was not involved.

Giving makes us a part of His plan. Are you financially struggling? Begin at that place - be faithful. Are you more afraid of not giving or giving too much? We miss out when we focus on a dollar number. It is more about value! Tithing of 10% is not a New Testament teaching. In the New Testament, they gave everything. They valued what they gained more than what was being given. They had already sacrificed much, but "as each could" they still gave. This is a heart issue.

Choose to give. Choose to serve. Choose to worship. Choose to go even when it's hard.

How do you feel like you are a part of what God is doing?

Do you go when God calls or do you look at your circumstances or your past failures?

What does it mean to be afraid of not giving versus giving too much for your budget?

Is worship about a feeling to you?