

THE GENEROSITY THAT SHOULD MARK US - EZRA 2:68-69

Note that the number of slaves (v. 65), in light of the overall number (v. 64), shows there was about one slave to every six freemen. Therefore, some of the returnees would have had substantial wealth, and, though there was good reasons to hold it back in view of the uncertain times, they instead gave generously.

As New Covenant people, we are not overly interested in building Towns and Temples. Yet, like these exiles, we are passionate to see God's Temple (the people) built up.

6. To this end, where might our generosity be directed?



Ezra 2 is only a "church roll" with names and numerals, and with some addresses. It is not titillating to read. But we could do worse than being like this "church:"

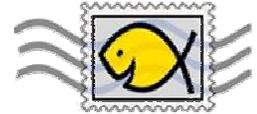
Here is a people...

- With a passion for worship
- Who don't care whether they are recognised (2:40-42)
- Who look back and see the strange twists of God's providence in bringing them to Himself
- Who have a place for the uncertain and fearful members of the flock and
- Who are affirming their allegiance by their generosity.

A Note on Ezra 2:40-42

Although probably all in these verses are Levites (341 of them), Kidner is probably right that those in v. 40 directly assisted the priests (seventy-four of them; cf. Num. 3:5-10). That's one Levite to every fifty-eight priests. Those are precious few Levites to do the chores and the assisting tasks connected with temple worship - no big incentive for Levites to return. But here are seventy-four of them who did. There was plenty of work for them, but little recognition or status.

A good bit of Christian work is pretty plain and basic - not much drama or flair about it. We are not called to promote ourselves or to gain status and recognition, to make the Christian "All Star" team. Yet, an assisting role does not appeal to our pride. We don't want to play second fiddle. We want credit, recognition, thanks, praise, and visibility - or we'll be "hurt" (see 1 Cor. 3:5). (Davis, Dr R. *IIIM Magazine*, Volume 2, Number 44, October 30 to November 5, 2000)



EZRA CHAPTER 2



SUNDAY ROLL CALL

A Place for Every Person

SPYING OUT THE CHURCH ROLL

Ezra Chapter 2

We might as well admit that most of Ezra 2 doesn't exactly give us a warm glow inside. In Ezra 2 we have a list of returnees in 538 B.C., years before Ezra came on the scene. We can find a parallel to Ezra 2 in Nehemiah 7, but we will focus on Ezra 2.

In this chapter we snoop on the church roll and find it instructive, for it shows us what is - or should be - characteristic of the people of God.

THE PASSION THAT SHOULD RULE US - EZRA 2:36-39

In vv. 2b-35 we have the tallies of the lay people; in vv 36-39 we have the tallies of four clans of priests. The total of almost 4,300 (actually, 4,289) priests constitutes approximately 10% of the total of v. 64. One in ten of the returnees was a priest.

1. What do you think was attracting so many priests?

2. Why would life in exile make returning to the temple desirable?

3. How does the gospel deal with the joint desire we have to depart and be with the Lord and yet remain in the place God has given us to roam about in?

THE PROVIDENCE THAT LEADS US - EZRA 2:43-58

68% of the names of the temple servants are of foreign origin, and 33-40% of "Solomon's servants" are foreign names. Perhaps descendants of prisoners of war (during David's time) or descendants of the pagan enclaves that Solomon pressed into slavery (1 Kings 9:20-21).

It seemed to be a chance occurrence - an ancestor, captured in war years ago, had been brought into Israel, and had done menial grunt work around the first temple. But that placed them in the very sanctuary of truth, where they might see the gospel of atonement via the sacrifices, or hear priestly instruction. Somewhere in the passing of generations the truth took hold so that these "foreigners" came to be numbered among God's people in Ezra 2.

4. What do we learn through the tragic entry of these people into Israel - then - and their place amongst God's people - now?

THE UNCERTAINTY THAT CAN SHADOW US EZRA 2:59-63

Here are three lay families and three priestly families that are unable to prove their descent (vv 59b, 62). They did not have the paperwork but that did not keep them from "coming up" from Babylon, from joining God's people. They remained among the people of God even though this uncertainty hung over them.

Is there a rough analogy here with those Christians who lack assurance or evidence of their salvation?

5. In light of Ezra, how might we respond to this uncertainty in the church?
