

## Ezra 2:1-70, “Those who Chose to Return”

### Introduction:

“Chapters like Ezra 2 are among the most **uninviting** portions of the Bible to the modern reader both because of their tedious nature & cause of their overtones of racial exclusivism & pride” – Bruce Waltke

2 Tim. 3:16-17, **All** Scripture is inspired by God & profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

- “The Bible was not written to you, but it was written for you”
  - Genesis through Deuteronomy were written specifically to the nation of Israel.
  - Luke & Acts were written specifically to Theophilus.
  - YET, the Bible is written **FOR you**—there are lessons to glean from it—lessons about the Lord, the sinfulness of man, God’s promises kept & grace given.
- What are the purposes of these genealogies?
  - Instruction. The Lord keeps His word. It is a monument to God’s faithfulness.
  - Endurance. We need to consider the endurance of those who have gone before us.
  - Encouragement. What does this text teach us about the Lord? If He keeps His promises to His ancient people, won’t He keep His promises to us?

\*Rom. 15:4, “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance & through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

**8 groups:** those who can prove their descent (vss. 2-58) and those who cannot (vss. 59-63).

1. The Leaders (2a)
2. The Laymen (2b-35)
3. The Priests (36-39)
4. The Levites (40-42)
5. The Temple Servants (43-54)
6. Sons of Solomon’s Servants (55-58)
7. Israelites of doubtful origin (59-60)
8. Priests of doubtful origin (61-63)

### Why didn’t more Levites return? (Vss. 40-42)

1. Maybe not so many Levites were exiled to Babylon due to **lower status** than priests (menial).
2. Levites could not own land in Israel, but were set apart for God & supported by God’s people. Here in Babylon, they may have **owned land** & didn’t want to give that up.
  - Not owning land was originally a curse for the tribe of Levi (Gen. 34:25-31, 49:5-7).
  - Yet the Lord turned it into a blessing (Ex. 32:25-28, Num. 18:20, Dt. 33:8-11).
3. “Some speculate the Levites were particularly invested in worship at the high places, scattered on the hills all around pre-exilic Israel & Judah. The purifying fires of exile effectively **burned out** this idolatrous impulse; therefore few Levites wanted to return to the Promised Land. – David Guzik

Francis Schaeffer: “One thing that has encouraged me, as I have wrestled with such questions in my own life, is the way God used Moses’ rod, **a stick of wood**... Consider the mighty ways in which God used a dead stick of wood. “God so used a stick of wood” can be a banner cry for **each** of us... Though we are limited & weak in talent, physical energy & psychological strength, we are not less than a stick of wood... Then, **I can** become useful in Gd’s hands. The Scripture emphasizes that much can come from little if the little is truly consecrated to God... But if a Christian is consecrated, does this mean he will be in a **big place** instead of a little place? The answer? ‘We must remember throughout our lives that in God’s sight there are **no** little people & **no** little places.’ Only one thing is important: to be consecrated persons in God’s place for us, at each moment.”

### **Priests of Doubtful Origin (Vss. 61-63)**

- **Urim & Thummim** – “**Lights & Perfections**” (Ex. 28). 2 flat stones(?) used by the high priest to determine will of God. YES & NO on either side(?) Priest drew them out of his breast pocket to receive God’s answer. Josephus: they illuminated in the priest’s pocket??
- Answers could be “yes”, “no”, or “**no answer**.” (1 Sam. 14:36-37)

### **Conclusion**

1. *The Lord is faithful*. This chapter showcases God’s faithfulness to bring **a remnant** back to Israel as He promised. “All that the Father gives me will come to me...” (Jn. 6:37)
2. When the Lord restores His people, *He does not erase the consequences* of their sins. They did not return to **rebuilt** cities & a beautiful land. They came back to rubble which required hard work to return the cities & land back to good condition. Spiritually speaking, it is **also** true of us. The Lord can & does “restore to (us) the years that the locusts have eaten” (Jl 2), yet the consequences of living for your kingdom are still there, and still very much with you.
3. When the Lord restores you, **praise Him for it!** He may give you humility where you never had it, or a heart for those who have wasted their lives on the stuff of this world, or a deeper relationship with Christ, and make you more fruitful for the Kingdom. The rubble is still there... learn from it, thank Him for His grace and get back in the saddle!