

BOOK OF EZRA
GOD RESTORES A REMNANT
EZRA 2:1-67

Introduction

It's difficult to find anything more difficult to read through than a list of names! (e.g. The Genealogies of Scripture and similar chapters.)

However that is what we are dealing with today. Don't go to sleep on me already, OK! Don't put your mind on cruise control and think that this Scripture is not important!

As a matter of fact, it is important, just because of the fact that it is included in Scripture!

2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

How much Scripture? ALL Scripture...and just exactly what does ALL mean?
ALL MEANS ALL AND THAT'S ALL THAT ALL MEANS!

And the Bible says that ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God for our profit! So, even if its not our favorite part of Scripture, we need to see the profit in even the most seemingly mundane parts of Scripture like the name lists.

Now unlike a lot of the "name lists" in Scripture, this one isn't a genealogy. It's really more like a census. Now we know that a census numbers an entire nation. And while this does number the remnant of the nation that returned to Israel it doesn't include those who were left behind, so it's more like a passenger manifest...or we could say it's a first census of those that returned!

Over 70 years before, God had allowed Nebuchadnezzar to carry His chosen people into exile from Jerusalem and Judah. Now it was time for them to return, but only a remnant of them returned with the first purpose of rebuilding the temple. Those not on this list stayed behind in Babylon.

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Remember the in Chapter 1 we saw how God uses who He chooses—Kings, His people, even those who are not His people. Then we saw how God's things—the vessels of the house of the LORD that had been taken during Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Jerusalem 70 years earlier— were restored so that they could eventually be used in the Temple again after it was rebuilt!

Here in this Chapter, we see God restoring a remnant of His people who were carried away into captivity. Now, we all know that God is all powerful, but one thing that is amazing is that God chooses to accomplish His work through people!

Now, while we know it is God's desire is for ALL people to respond to His desires, but the reality is that **only a remnant will!** But understand that in that remnant, God provides the kinds of people it takes to accomplish His work!

And just like the remnant we're looking at right now, **the LORD wants each of us to respond to His call the same way this remnant did! And whatever category we might find ourselves in doesn't really matter! What matters is that God has a place for each of us in His work! And He wants each of us to just serve Him faithfully in the place He has called us!**

Let's take a look at FOUR KINDS OF PEOPLE it takes to accomplish God's work:

I. WE SEE IT TOOK SOME LEADERS! (EZRA 2:2a)

The first kind of people it takes to accomplish God's work is leaders! The leaders are the names we find listed in the first sentence of verse 2.

There was a fellow named Bob who told his wife one Sunday morning that he wasn't going to church. "First," he said, "I'm tired. Second, the people there don't like me. And third, the sermons are boring." But Bob's wife wouldn't take no for an answer. "Bob," she said, "you have to go. First, we always worship on Sunday. Second, it doesn't matter whether they like us or not. And third, you are the pastor, you have to go!"

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Just like Bob, I've learned by experience that leadership isn't for the faint of heart...and certainly these leaders we see here weren't faint of heart!

Think of the task that lay before them. They had to get over 42,000 people to follow them. But it wasn't like they were just getting them to follow them down the street. They were leading them from a place that had been their home for as long as they could remember.

Many of them were probably born there and grew up there.
They had raised kids there.
They had built lives there.
They were comfortable there.

Think about how comfortable you would be in Orange Park if your family had arrived here 70 years ago.

And now God placed this group of men in a position where they were to lead them away from there.

Now certainly their task wasn't as great as Moses' task! He had to lead an estimated 2 million grumbling Israelites through a wilderness!

In Moses' day, the Israelites were actually in bondage.
They were being used as slave laborers.
The Israelites of Moses' day were far from comfortable.
And the longer they sat were in captivity, the worse it got.

That wasn't the case with the Israelites of Zerubbabel's day.

Things weren't too bad for them.
They were allowed to own their own land and pretty much live like regular Persians.

That's what the Persians were looking for anyway. They wanted the nations they conquered to blend in.

So, it was in that kind of environment that God called these men to lead.

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They had to lead a comfortable people away from their comfort and into a land fraught with discouragement, opposition, frustration, and most of all, hard work.

Its kind of like trying to Pastor and lead a Church here America in 2015 to the place where God wants them! God wants us to leave our comfort zones and do something for Him!

What did that leadership look like in Ezra's day? Obedience! Obedience to the call that God had placed on their lives! Zerubbabel had to obey the call that came with his birthright! He was the heir to the throne of David. As such, he was the chief prince of Israel.

And, as we see in Haggai and Zechariah, Jeshua was the chief priest of Israel. He had to obey the call that came with his high-priestly office.

If you want to think of it that way, they were the Moses and Aaron of the first return from exile! Only they didn't have signs and wonders to get their message across like Moses and Aaron did! They were acting based on God's Word that they had!

But God knew that two men couldn't lead by themselves. So He gave them a group of other men to assist them and learn from them and help them!

Proverbs 24:5-6 – "A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength. For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety."

Proverbs 15:22 – "Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established."

God surrounded Zerubbabel and Jeshua with a multitude of counselors, to enable them to be the leaders God had called them to be.

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So, the first kind of people it took to accomplish God's work is the leaders. But what are leaders without followers?

II. WE SEE IT TOOK SOME LAYMEN! (EZRA 2:2-35)

Somebody said that a person who thinks he's leading with nobody following is really just taking a walk. So leaders have to have followers or they aren't really leaders.

So the second kind of people it takes to accomplish God's work is the laymen. In our context, we would say that laymen are the people in the pew. In Israel's context, they would be the people listed from 2b through verse 35.

The fact is, God has not called everyone to be a leader in accomplishing His work. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of people He calls are not called to leadership positions.

Out of over 42,000 people listed here, we see that God only called 11 people to be their leaders. He called the rest of them to follow their leadership.

Notice how the laymen are grouped here in verses 3-35.

The ones through verse 20 are grouped according to their family names.

But the ones from verse 21 through 35 are grouped according to the town they were from.

Why is that? One reason could be because that describes the class of people they were.

The ones who were grouped according to their family names were probably what we would consider "high-class" folks.

Maybe they were people who had a name—whose family had made a name for themselves.

They had land and possessions in their family names. They were the "old money" Jewish names in Babylon.

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But notice that that's not the only laymen listed. From verse 21 through 35, they're grouped according to what town they're from because they didn't have a big family name.

They probably didn't own land in their family names.

They were the working class folks.

In our day, they would be the ones who make it paycheck to paycheck.

But both of these groups are the kind of laymen it takes to accomplish God's work. He calls people from all different backgrounds, and of all different means and abilities. And what does He require? Obedience! Obedience to the call that God had placed on their lives!

So, we've seen that it takes leaders and laymen...

III. WE SEE IT TOOK SOME OF THE LORD'S MINISTERS! (EZRA 2:36-58)

These were the people that God called to do the MINISTRY work of the temple. So, why didn't God just wait until the temple was complete and then send for them? Well, just because they didn't have a building didn't mean that ministry was supposed to wait!

The names listed here show that God's ministry included all sorts of things. It included people things and facility things.

All too often, we tend to put ministry in a box. In our context, we think ministry is something "the minister" does. But that's not how God sees it. He sees it as the work of many people!

The first two groups listed here are the priests and the Levites. Those were people who were born into the position. The priests made up about 10% of the people.

Originally, King David had organized the priests into 24 family groups.

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The sad thing about the priests in our passage is that they only represented 4 of the 24 groups.

Now, the situation with the priests was bad enough, but it was nothing compared to the situation with the Levites. The Law originally provided for many times the number of Levites as compared to priests.

In other words if there were 10 priests, there might be well over 100 Levites. But now, even with the reduced number of priests, there were less Levites than priests.

Later on, we will see Ezra take a group of exiles to Jerusalem, but he could only get 38 Levites to go with him.

Isn't it interesting that the people with the most official ministry offices were the least interested in doing ministry? But they weren't the only ones God called as His ministers. He not only called people who were born into the position, He called people by the tasks they could do.

Verse 41 shows He called the choir and praise group.
And verse 42 shows that He called the ushers.
That word "*porters*" literally means "*gatekeepers*."
And if you look in 1 Chronicles 9:17-29, you can see that their job description lines up pretty well with the job description of our ushers.

The priests and Levites were called by birth. The singers and ushers were called by task. But there was one more group of the Lord's ministers. That was the group that was called by grace.

Verses 43-54 call part of them the *Nethinims*. That simply means "*the dedicated ones*." **They were temple servants who had dedicated themselves to His service.**

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Verses 55-58 call the rest of these ministers "*the children of Solomon's servants*." Both the *Nethinims* and *the children of Solomon's servants* were descended from people that Israel had conquered.

Instead of killing them, they allowed them to be circumcised and serve in the temple. Over the years, it would have been easy for these and their later generations to forsake God and go back to their homelands.

But many of them didn't. And these people, with nothing more to bind them than their **willing obedience**... basically volunteered to go back and minister with the Jews. **They ministered simply because they wanted to be obedient.**

As opposed to the priests and Levites, these folks birthright was one of bondage. As opposed to the singers and ushers, their personal gifts and talents aren't mentioned. But God called them to minister just the same. And they did. Out of thanks for God's grace that He poured out on them by allowing them to serve Him!

They returned with the exiles. They were counted as the Lord's ministers just like the ones who held the high positions. They were counted as the Lord's ministers just like the ones who held the very visible positions. So, God calls leaders, laymen, the Lord's ministers

IV. WE SEE IT TOOK SOME LEFTOVERS! (EZRA 2:59-67)

The fourth kind of people it takes to accomplish God's work is leftovers. Remnants of the remnant so to speak!

As we look at verses 59 through 67, one thing is striking. This is quite a hodgepodge of characters!

Israelites who couldn't prove their lineage!

Priests who couldn't prove their lineage.

Male and female servants and farm animals.

A hodgepodge of characters that most people wouldn't have anything to do with. But not God!

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To Him, they were all equally important for the work He was going to do! He called them all! From Zerubbabel and Jeshua to the lowest maid-servant, God called them all! Aren't you thankful that God calls us all?

LOOK AT EPHESIANS 2:13-22

God calls each of us! He may call each of us to different tasks, but He calls each of us! He calls some to leadership—not just the pastor!

If He says that a multitude of counselors is a good thing, then He's going to call people who are wise and able to do that! He also calls people to be good laymen!

Believe it or not, God calls some people just to follow! But He calls them to follow well! To follow supportively! To follow actively! To follow positively!

People are also called to the Lord's ministry! Once again, not just the pastor or the deacons. He calls people to use their gifts, talents and abilities in ministry! **(1 Peter 4:10-11)**

Finally, and probably most importantly, God calls leftovers. Yes, He uses the leftovers to build this thing that He calls the body of Christ! He fitly frames all of us together to build His habitation

If He did it with the ragtag remnant we see in our passage, don't you think He can do it here with us? So how's He going to do it here? The same way He did it there! Through our willing obedience!

Whoever you are. Whatever area God has called you to. Obey Him and do it! The outcome isn't really the issue! The issue is our obedience! God will take care of the outcome! We are just to be obedient to do the things He's called us to do! If we each do that, He will fitly frame us together and grow us unto an holy temple in the Lord!