

Ezra 2 “Lest We Forget”

For the Children: Some of the boys and girls attended the dawn-parade in Upper Hutt last Thursday. No doubt they heard about the soldiers who risked their lives to fight enemies who threatened New Zealand in the past. Men who did this are honoured, even today, long after the event. Well, many families risked their lives to return to re-build Jerusalem and its Temple. They are honoured in the Bible, too. But God is honoured far more. For He made the return possible. And He sent His Son to die so we could all have an even better place to go to.

Questions: What is the better City to which we go? How should we look at the church and our place in it? How can we show that we see church-membership as a great privilege?

Introduction:

First Point: The People Restored

- 1) The Honour Roll: The Lord honoured those who upheld the covenant by returning to Jerusalem – by listing the names of their clans. But as with the names in the “Book of Life” (Rev. 20:12) it is only by His grace. The list reminds us of that grace, primarily. That grace is further seen in that even some from the Northern Kingdom were preserved, so that all God’s promises to Israel would be kept. The list also shows us that the Lord knows those who are His, every individual and his family. We may be insignificant to the world, but not to the Lord! Yet the number of returnees was small compared to the number in Israel in the previous glory-days
- 2) Land-Rights: Each of these families returned to the area from which he came prior to Exile. This is not because men have an inherent right to the land of their forefathers, but because God had *promised* a particular lot of land to each family. The list shows that even Exile could not thwart this promise. This is a reminder that the Lord is also completely faithful to His promise to us re our eternal inheritance in the new heavens and earth – despite our sin and the world’s enmity
- 3) The Unknown Soldiers: Some returnees lacked proof of their ancestry/inheritance. This created a problem with the land-inheritance, because God’s promise was to Israel. The mixing in of foreigners was a great concern then. Later, this concern would be twisted into Jewish pride in physical descent from Abraham. Jesus warned against this, for example in Jn. 8:31f

Second Point: The Church Restored

- 1) The Restoration of Church-Leaders: The restoration of the OT church with its ministry is drawn to our attention by the detailed list of leaders. Zerubbabel is mentioned (v. 2), the closest they would have to a Davidic King. Similarly, Jeshua/Joshua the high-priest. Levites, Temple-singers, gatekeepers and other servants are listed. But again, the numbers and glory are down, compared to the past. They still needed their Messiah to bring the greater glory
- 2) The Loss of Levites: It appears that Ezra especially had trouble getting the Levites to return from Babylon. See 8:15-20. Perhaps they saw their tasks as too menial, or resented not being able to inherit land. They had forgotten the truth of Ps. 84:10! Even the most menial task in the church is a great privilege
- 3) The Loss of Financial Support: While “some” gave free-will offerings to support the re-building of the Temple,(vss. 68-69), comparison with Ex. 25:4-7 suggests less than full support from the people. They, too, had forgotten the privilege of being part of the church and under her ministry – and the importance of this restoration-work for pointing ahead to the Messiah.
- 4) The Unknown Priests: Some of the priests also lacked proof of Jewish ancestry. They were not allowed to serve in the sanctuary until their pedigree could be proven. The Urim and Thummim might give proof, but it seems they were never recovered. This shows how important church-office is: that even in dire need, men were not allowed to serve if they could not meet the criteria

Conclusion:

