

The Record of the Remnant

Text: Ezra 2:1-70

Introduction:

- This chapter provides a record of the faithful remnant that returned to the land. So important is this record to God Almighty, it is also included in the Book of Nehemiah 7:6-73. “An important feature of the book of Ezra is the writer’s extensive use of historical documents and records. The decrees and proclamations of monarchs are recorded (1:1-4; 6:8-12). Letters are referred to (4:6-10), or are quoted in full (4:11-22). Ezra’s own genealogy appears in 7:1-5.” (M.K. Hall)
- 1. At first glance, we might be tempted to think “this is just a list of names, how can it possibly help me in my Christian life?” We need to always remember that nothing is in the Word of God by accident and that every part of the Scriptures is profitable to us.
- 2. Harry Ironside describes this chapter as “a sample page from the books of eternity...A leaf out of God’s memorial record is spread before us for our inspection. Similar specimen lists are given us in other parts of the book of God...God shows how carefully He was taking note of each individual, each family, and the work they accomplished for Him...There is something peculiarly solemn about records such as these. Many, yea, most of the names in them are for us only names, but God has not forgotten one of the persons once called by these names on earth, and “in that day” He will reward according to the work of each. Some too must “suffer loss” for opportunities neglected or half-hearted service. Nothing of good or ill shall be overlooked by Him who sees not as man sees, who looks not on the outward appearance but on the heart.”
- 3. As we study this chapter, keep in mind the principle of a remnant and let us endeavour to be those who are a part of a godly remnant in our day even as these saints were in theirs. The record first focuses on the people in general, then moves to outline those with specific roles in the nation. For us, we can learn a spiritual lesson from each division of the remnant we can apply to our Christian walk. We will note **7 lessons** we can draw from a study of this sacred record of a saintly remnant.

This remnant was...

I. A STIRRED REMNANT (VS. 1-35)

This section records the **people in general**. This remnant was raised up by God (Ez. 1:5) from amongst the exiles. This part of the record divides naturally into two parts:

A. The Leaders of the Remnant (Vs. 1-2)

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We are reminded that a work of God requires godly leadership and oversight and when God is stirring up the people of God to do a work for Him, He will also raise up men to lead His people in the carrying out of His plans. We suggest a two-fold division within this leadership team:

1. The Principal Leaders – Zerubbabel and Jeshua are mentioned first and as the Book unfolds, it becomes clear that they were the primary leaders of the rebuilding of the temple (See Ez. 3:2).
 - a. Zerubbabel was the National leader – he was a descendant of the line of David through Jehoiachin (see 1 Chr. 3:17) and is therefore given the role of leading the nation.
 - b. Jeshua was the Spiritual leader – he was the high priest and is referenced in 3:2, 8; 4:3 & 5:2. He is also called “Joshua the high priest” in Haggai 1:1 and Zechariah 3:1.
2. The Supporting leaders – another nine names are mentioned along with Zerubbabel and Jeshua. We do not know much about them but evidently, they also played a role in the leadership of the remnant. They were likely “the chief of the fathers” who are mentioned 7 times in Ezra (1:5, 2:68, 3:12, 4:2, 3, 8:29, 10:16).
3. Principle: Godly leadership is required to lead a remnant of God’s people in a work of rebuilding. God’s way is to raise up a leader or two and also a team of men to aid and support them in their leadership. We see this principle in the New Testament. Pastors are God’s primary overseers and leaders of the New Testament assembly with Deacons raised up of the Lord to support and help them in their role as leaders. God also puts his hand on “chief” men within the assembly to lead their families, set a good example and help the forward direction of the work of God.

B. The Laymen of the Remnant (Vs. 3-35)

In this section are listed all the people apart from the special categories which follow later. They are in two groups – those who are recorded according to their families (Vs. 3-19) and those who are recorded according to their native towns and villages (Vs. 20-35).

1. The people recorded by family names (Vs. 3-19).
 - a. Notice for the majority of the remnant, they are not named specifically. In this section they are grouped under family names but each individual is not listed. The point is that while the majority are unknown to us, they were known to God and noted by Him. God allows some of His servants to be named and used as public examples (i.e., heroes of the faith past and present) but this is not the case for most. The most important thing is that we are faithful to serve in God’s remnant and that we are known of Him.

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- b. This list of family names is a reminder of how God can stir whole families for His cause. What a blessing when a family group is yielded to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Let us pray for whole households to come to know Christ! (See Acts 16:31)
2. The people recorded by place names (Vs. 20-35).
 - a. There is some debate about whether the name in verse 20 (Gibbar) is a place name or a family name. Some suggest it is another name for Gibeon. Either way, after verse 20 it becomes clear that the people are being numbered according to geographical origin rather than by family groups.
 - b. It becomes apparent that a certain geographical order is being followed in the record. Fensham explains, “It starts in the south with Bethlehem and Netophah, moves to the north with Anathoth and Azmaveth, then to the northwest to the old Gibeonite confederacy with Kiriath-arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, to the far north of Judah with Michmas, Bethel, and Ai, to the southwest with Nebo, Magbish, Elam, and Harim, then to the vicinity of Joppa with Lod, Hadid, and Ono, and finally to the northwest with Jericho and Senaah.”
 - c. This list is a reminder of how God can do a work amongst a people from a specific locality. Revivals of history are a reminder of how God can and often does sovereignly move in particular nations, cities, towns, villages and neighborhoods according to His eternal wisdom.

II. A SACRED REMNANT (VS. 36-39)

This section contains details of the **priests**.

A. The Teams within the Priesthood (Vs. 36-39).

1. In the days of King David, the descendants of Aaron, the priests, were divided into twenty-four orders. It appears in Ezra 2 that four of these orders were represented in those who returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel. (M.K. Hall)
2. The children of Jedaiah (Vs. 36) were the second group named in 1 Chronicles 24:7. The children of Immer (Vs. 37) were the sixteenth group (24:14). Pashur (Vs. 38) is not mentioned in the list in 1 Chronicles 24. The children of Harim (Vs. 39) were the third order mentioned in 1 Chronicles 24:8. These priests were all descended from either Eleazar or Ithamar, the two surviving sons of Aaron after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu (1 Chr. 24:2, 5-19).

B. The Teaching from the Priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6, 5:10)

In the New Testament, unlike the Old Testament dispensation, every believer is a priest. 1 Peter 2:9-10 “But ye *are* a chosen generation, a **royal priesthood**, an holy nation, a peculiar people; **that ye should shew forth the praises** of him who hath called you out of darkness

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into his marvellous light: Which in time past *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” To be a priest of God is to be in:

1. A privileged position – a priest is one who has access to God and His presence. We have direct access to God through Christ our Mediator and High Priest.
2. A separated position – a priest is set apart by God for special, consecrated service. In like manner, we are God’s peculiar treasure, separated from sin and the world for our God.
3. A sacred position – a priest’s primary function was in things relating to worship. How the church of God needs priestly men and women today who will worship God in spirit and in truth.

III. A SERVING REMNANT (VS. 40-57)

There are five groups listed who all had important servant roles to play in relation to the house of God.

A. The Levites (Vs. 40)

1. The priesthood was comprised only of those direct descendants of Aaron. The Levites were the remainder of the tribe of Levi. The Levites would therefore far outnumber the priests in Israel.
2. However, there is a striking contrast between the number of priests and the number of Levites who returned with the remnant. There were only 74 Levites who returned at this point whereas there were over 4,000 priests. It should be noted that the singers (Vs. 41) and the children of the porters (Vs. 42) were also Levites. “Verse 40 speaks of the Levites proper, who were those who personally assisted the priests in the ministry of the worship in the Temple.” (M.K. Hall)
3. Whereas the predominant thought connected with the priesthood is worship, the predominant thought connected with the Levites is that of service. Like Ezra’s day (see Ez. 8:15), there is often an abundance of worshippers but few servers!
4. There was a wide variety of service available to the Levites and so it is with us in the age of grace. It is for each of us to seek to discern what the Lord would have us do for Him in the local church and then seek to do it with His help and blessing. God wants us to be **both** worshippers and servants in His house.

B. The Singers (Vs. 41)

1. This traces back to 1 Chronicles 25 where David appointed singers from the tribe of Levi for the house of God which his son Solomon was to build. They were to “prophesy with harps, with psalteries and with cymbals” (1 Chr. 25:1).
2. Every New Testament believer is to be a singer in the house of God. May we be a singing remnant!

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- a. Eph. 5:19 “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and making melody in your heart to the Lord;”
- b. Col. 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

C. The Porters (Vs. 42)

1. The Hebrew word used means a gatekeeper or doorkeeper. 1 Chronicles 26:1-19 lists the porters. They were “the keepers of the gates of the tabernacle” (Vs. 19). They “had the oversight of the gates of the house of the Lord” (Vs. 23). They “were over the chambers (storehouses) and treasuries of the house of God” (Vs. 26), and were responsible every morning for the opening of the Temple (Vs. 27). (M.K. Hall)
2. The work of God needs gatekeepers in the sense of godly men who are watchful to refuse entry to wolves who would seek to enter in and devour the flock (See Acts 20:28-31).
3. The work of God needs doorkeepers in the sense of servant hearted men who will aid the people of God as they come to the place of worship and who take care of the offerings in a responsible manner. Serving on the door is a very important ministry in the local church.

D. The Nethinims (Vs. 43-54)

1. Of the Nethinims M.K. Hall comments, If the Levites assisted the priests, the Nethinims, in turn, were those who assisted the Levites. The word means “those given” – that is, given to the Levites as Temple servants.
2. The word first occurs in 1 Chronicles 9:2, where the first inhabitants of Jerusalem on the return from the exile were the “Israelites, the priests, Levites, and the Nethinims”. In Ezra 8:20 it is stated that David and the princes appointed the Nethinims for the service of the Levites. The origin of these people is not precisely known but it is generally accepted that they are the Gibeonites. (See Josh. 9:23)
3. We could say these dear saints served the servants! It is a reminder that we are all servants no matter what place of service we occupy in the work of God and we are to serve each other.
4. The Nethinims remind us that the most humble and menial acts of service are precious to God. Look at the large section of verses dedicated to them in this record!

E. The Servants of Solomon (Vs. 55-58)

1. It appears there is a close association between the children of Solomon’s servants and the Nethinims.
2. They were descendants of the peoples of the land whom Joshua and his successors had failed to conquer and destroy (See 1 Kings 9:21).

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3. Note: A key principle in all of the above is this: the work of God needs lots of servant hearted men and women if it is going to succeed. If Christ, the Son of God and Lord of glory is called “my servant” by the Father in the Word of God (compare Is. 42:1-3 & Matt. 12:18-21), how much more should we all be servants for God’s glory?

IV. A SEPARATED REMNANT (VS. 59-63)

Not everyone qualified to be a part of this godly remnant. Evidence of one’s lineage was required to qualify and not all did. The purity of the remnant was of great importance. Notice that two groups are noted as not meeting the qualifications:

A. The People who were Separated from the Remnant (Vs. 59-60)

1. There were 652 people who tried to attach themselves to the returning remnant who were disqualified as they “could not shew their father’s house, and their seed, whether they were of Israel.” It is interesting to note that unlike the people in Vs. 20-35 who are listed by their place of origin in Judah, these were listed according to five locations in the Babylon area. They professed to be of Judah but in reality, they were of Babylon.
2. It is not unusual when there is a movement of God for the false to be caught up with the genuine. In the first great Exodus movement of the children of Israel out of Egypt, “a mixed multitude went up also with them” (Ex. 12:38).
3. God is in the business of separating His people apart for Himself in purity and that sometimes means that there is a departure of those who are not truly of the people of God. 1 John 2:19 “**They went out from us**, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: but *they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”
4. Drawing a New Testament application, we are to strive for the purity of the local assembly. All are welcome to come and hear the Gospel but only those who have a sound testimony and show evidence of the New Birth are to be admitted to the membership of the local church with its attendant privileges.

B. The Priests who were Separated from the Remnant (Vs. 61-63)

1. The language is even stronger for the priesthood and with good reason. The priests were to be the spiritual leaders of the nation.
2. These priests were to be removed until they could seek God’s guidance by way of the Urim and Thummim (Vs. 63). The Hebrew words mean “lights” and “perfections” (Newberry). They were in the breastplate of the high priest and were consulted when an answer to a problem was required.
3. Ironside wisely remarks, “Some there were who could not show their genealogy. These (the priests) were not declared positively to be laying false claim to the priestly title. They were simply set to one

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side because they could not prove it, until an inspired priest should rise up who could speak with authority. So, we may well treat some now, who cannot trace their genealogy, but nevertheless insist on the Christian place as rightfully theirs. We dare not say they are not born of God – and those who do so essay to speak are guilty of gross presumption, but we cannot own them as such until they can give clear evidence of being indeed of the priestly company and partakers of the Divine nature.”

4. As there are people who claim to be a part of the company of the saints who are not, so there are also those who claim to be leaders of God’s people who in reality are “polluted” and should be removed from leadership positions.
5. Sadly, today in the realm of “Christendom” broadly speaking, the majority of “leaders” are imposters, false shepherds, agents of Satan to lead the sheep astray. Bible believing churches must take care not to elect leaders unless they are saved and sound in doctrine.

V. A SUMMED-UP REMNANT (VS. 64-67)

These verses contain the total figures of the returnees and their animals.

A. The Totals of the People (Vs. 64-65)

1. The saints – 42,360 (Vs. 64)
2. The servants – 7,337 (Vs. 65a)
3. The singers – 200 (Vs. 65b)
4. Note: God is a God of detail and order. The early church also knew the number of its members (Acts 1:15). We are also reminded that God takes account of all who are faithful to him. No one is overlooked or forgotten.

B. The Totals of the Animals (Vs. 66-67)

1. Horses – 736 (Vs. 66a)
2. Mules – 245 (Vs. 66b)
3. Camels – 435 (Vs. 67a)
4. Asses – 6,720 (Vs. 67b)

VI. A SACRIFICIAL REMNANT (VS. 68-69)

This was a sacrificial, giving remnant of people. Comparing this record with Nehemiah’s we learn that not only did the chief of the fathers set the example by giving but the people in general also participated in this offering (See Nehemiah 7:70-72). Note five important truths about their giving which we can learn from:

A. They Gave Willingly (Vs. 68a)

1. The word ‘freely’ is the same word translated “willingly offered” in the previous chapter (Ezra 1:6).
2. 2 Cor. 9:7 “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, *so let him give*; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”

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B. They Gave Purposefully (Vs. 68b)

1. They gave “for the house of God to set it up in his place”.
2. As the Lord leads us as a church, we should back the projects in the will of God with sacrificial giving.

C. They Gave According to Ability (Vs. 69a)

1. This is a very important principle of giving in the Bible. We give according to our ability. This takes us beyond the tithe to see how else we might be used of God in the area of giving. It also takes the pressure of us from fretting over what we can't give and focuses us rather on joyfully contributing what we can give.
2. The principle is stated well in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first *day* of the week **let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him**, that there be no gatherings when I come.”
3. How are we to give as believers? Very simply. As God has “prospered” us. One pastor put it well when he said “When God increases your finances, don't increase your standard of living, increase your standard of giving.” Obviously, it is not wrong to enjoy the fruit of our labours and to provide for our families but there is a lot of wisdom in that statement. If God entrusts you with wealth, be prayerful as to how God might lead you to help the furtherance of the Gospel.
4. 2 Cor. 8:12 states it well, “For if there be first **a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.**”
5. “The rule laid down in 1 Corinthians 16:2 is one that seldom claims a second thought with many. At the weekly gathering a coin is dropped in the box, often with no previous forethought, and certainly not as a result of a prayerful laying by at home according as God has prospered the giver during the past week. Were this generally acted upon, there would be no dearth of means to carry on the work of the Lord in the home and foreign fields, nor any lack of provision for the poor among the saints.” (H.A. Ironside)

D. They Gave Generously (Vs. 69b)

1. Remember that this remnant returned to a burnt-out, broken-down Jerusalem. Much material and manpower would be needed to not just raise the temple but also to rebuild their homes. If any group of people had an excuse not to give to God's work, it would be this group of people. And yet, we find them generously and sacrificially giving to God's work.
2. My mother taught me growing up that you “can never out give the Lord”. When we honour the Lord with our finances and put Him first, we can trust that he will supply our needs (Phil. 4:19).

E. They Gave Practically (Vs. 69c)

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1. They also contributed “one hundred priests’ garments”. This was an act of faith as the temple was not even constructed yet.
2. They had an eye to discern not only the immediate needs of the work of God but also the needs that would arise in the future. May we give in like manner!

VII. A SETTLED REMNANT (VS. 70)

A. They Settled where God had Placed them

B. They Stayed where God had Placed them

1. Make sure you STAY exactly where God has placed you in His will and don't move unless He clearly leads you elsewhere! How we need a faithful remnant of godly people who will “dwell” and abide where God has placed them.
2. Stay with sound doctrine, stay with your local church, stay with the Lord!

Conclusion: What kind of godly remnant do we need to be in our day? Let us strive to be a remnant like this remnant of old, a revived, worshipping, serving, singing, separated, consecrated, giving, abiding remnant.

Are you available for the Lord to use?