

30.11.2019 TRIALS, TRIBULATIONS AND LISTS

"These joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes" Nehemiah 10:29

This week's study is mainly focused on genealogies of the returning exiles.

Reluctance to Return to Jerusalem

It also looks at the fact that a majority of Jews did not return to Babylon. In Ezra 8: 15-20, Ezra finds that there are no sons of Levi among the Jews returning with him (8:15). They were able to persuade 'men of understanding' of the house of Levi to join the returning exiles.

The ones who did return to Jerusalem were 'a remnant'. In the end-time too, there will only be 'a remnant' that chooses to be faithful to God (Revelation 12:17). The rest of the church, 'the seed of the woman' will be deceived by the serpent.

At the time, Babylon was a great city. Its citizens dwelt in comfortable homes and many had become wealthy during the 70 years of captivity. In contrast, Jerusalem was in ruins. It is understandable why so many did not want to return. And yet, it is a revelation of where their loyalties lay. They chose to live in comfort rather than endure hardship in the land God had given them. Their spirit was different from their father Abraham who had left the world (Babylon) at the call of God so many centuries before.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Hebrews 11:8-10

Babylon is a symbol of all this world has to offer. It is called the 'Great City' and offers great wealth, power and influence to its citizens.

In contrast, Jerusalem is representative of the kingdom of God. It is the 'Holy City', for God offers His citizens holiness. Its citizens often have to endure hardship since Satan considers them his enemies. Like Moses, God's people '*choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin'* Hebrews 11:25

Where is your heart? Is it in Babylon or in Jerusalem?

Genealogies

In Hebrew the term for genealogy or pedigree is "the book of the generations."

Genealogies are very important in the Bible, though they may seem boring to us. Immediately after the Fall of Man (Genesis 3), the Bible describes 2 genealogies – the genealogy of Adam's son Seth who were faithful to God and through whom Messiah would come (Genesis 5) and the genealogy of Cain, the unfaithful descendants of Adam (Genesis 4:16-22). This pattern is seen throughout the Bible – the faithful and the unfaithful seed.

The importance of genealogies is described thus:

'Genealogies are often given in the Bible and have various uses in the unfolding story of redemption. Inasmuch as history necessarily clusters around great men, the connected history of God's dealing with men involves listing men in their connections with others of various ages. Genealogies and chronologies form the connecting link from early days to the

end of the Biblical period. Usually other ancient histories are partial and piecemeal. By means of genealogical records, God has given a connected history from Adam to Christ.

Genealogies also have lesser uses in the sacred record. God's blessings were often passed on in the family line and these genealogies express the covenant connections of ancient Israel. Military duty was by families. Certain offices such as the priesthood, the Levitical work, and the kingship, were hereditary, and genealogies trace the perpetuation of these offices. Also, land tenure in Israel was carried on chiefly through male descent. Genealogies therefore certified the title to ancestral holdings. Finally, in a tribal or semi-tribal community, a man's genealogy was his identification and means of location. It is roughly equal to the addresses of modern houses. People are located by country, state, city, and street.' *Encyclopaedia of the Bible*.

In our study this week we find the following lists and genealogies of people:

1. The list of the people who returned with Zerubbabel in 538 BC (the first return) – Ezra 2, Nehemiah 7:6-73.
2. The heads of the families who returned with Ezra in 457/458 BC (the second return) – Ezra 8.
3. The lists of people and families who lived in Jerusalem and those who lived in the surrounding cities - Nehemiah 11.
4. The list of the priests and Levite families who returned with Zerubbabel and later, those who were associated with Ezra and Nehemiah – Nehemiah 12:1-26

What do these genealogies and lists teach us?

1. It confirms the historical accuracy of the Bible and Bible prophecy.
Examples:
 - a. It describes Zerubbabel as a descendant of King David (Ezra 3:2, 8) and Ezra as a descendant of Aaron, the High priest (Ezra &:1-5).
 - b. It describes the Persian kings who authorised the return of the Jews and the re-building of Jerusalem. These have been authenticated historically (e.g. Ezra 1:1-5; 7:1).
2. God is a personal God. Though He sees the sweep of history, He is interested in the details of our lives.
Examples:
 - a. The detailed description of the families. Ezra 2, 8. Nehemiah 7, 11, 12.
 - b. The detailed description of the Levites and their various roles in the temple service. Nehemiah 12.
 - c. There is the statement that the singers were descendants of Asaph, leader of music and writer of psalms during the reign of Kings David and Solomon. Ezra 2:41: 3:10 Nehemiah 7:44; 11:22; 12:35, 46.
3. God is a faithful God; He keeps His covenant promises.

He returned the Jews to their own land despite their unfaithfulness.

"...the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you... Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live." Deuteronomy 30:3-6

4. God is interested in our spiritual genealogy.
Examples:
 - a. Only those who could prove their genealogy were allowed to serve in the Temple. Nehemiah 7:61-64
 - b. When in doubt, the priest would consult Urim and Thummim to ascertain a true Jew. Nehemiah 7:65, Ezra 2:63

Today we are often interested in numbers. How many 'come to church'? But God wants to know if those who claim to be His people are true Israelites – spiritual Israel...*For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God. Romans 2:28, 29*

5. Our destiny is determined by our birthright. What is our spiritual genealogy?

Are you a son of Adam or a son of God? All who are born as sons of Adam are condemned to eternal death, but all who are born again as sons of God in Christ are justified and heirs of eternal life. Our assurance of salvation is not based on our behaviour but on the Person and work of Christ Jesus.

Our condemnation or salvation is not based on our *behaviour* but on our *birthright*.

Today, Christ our High Priest is our Urim and Thummim. He knows us intimately and guides our feet in the paths of righteousness. He knows who we have chosen to be our spiritual Father. If we are of Adam, we will be prone to iniquity all our lives. But if we are of Abraham, our father in faith and if we have recognised and accepted Christ, the second Adam as our spiritual Father and Head, then His Spirit will lead us in the paths of righteousness and we will depart from iniquity. We will have nothing to do with the spirit of Babylon – the desire to go our own way and seek great things for ourselves.

The solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." 2 Timothy 2:19
