

Triennial Torah Study – 3rd Year 22/12/2012

 sightedmoon.com /triennial-torah-study-3-year-04042015 /

By Joseph F. Dumond

We continue this weekend with our regular Triennial Torah reading which can be found at https://sightedmoon.com/sightedmoon_2015/files/TriennialCycleBeginningAviv.pdf

Num 33		Ezra 1-2	1 Corin 15
---------------	--	-----------------	-------------------

Israel's Journeys; Instructions for the Conquest of the Land (Numbers 33)

This chapter contains a listing of the travels of the children of Israel, covering their 40 years in the wilderness, starting with the Exodus from Egypt. Some of the sites mentioned here, such as many of those in verses 5-18, are mentioned in Exodus and elsewhere in Numbers. Some are only given here, such as most of those mentioned in verses 19-29. But the list is not meant to be comprehensive, as there were other encampments that are not recorded here that are mentioned in Exodus and elsewhere in Numbers. God commanded Moses to draw up this account (verse 2). Since these were only temporary encampments for a traveling people, archaeologists have identified only a few of the actual locations with a reasonable degree of success. After covering their journeys, God tells Moses to say to the children of Israel, "When you cross the Jordan River into the land of Canaan, you must drive out all the people living there. You must destroy all their carved and molten images and demolish all their pagan shrines" (verses 51-52, New Living Translation). The reason is to cleanse the land for the inheritance of the tribes of Israel so that they can worship the true God without interference from pagan influences and practices. God warns them: "If you fail to drive out the people who live in the land, those who remain will be like splinters in your eyes and thorns in your sides.

They will harass you in the land where you live" (verse 55, NLT). God knows the land of Canaan is full of the symbols and representations of idolatrous worship—pictures, graven images, standing images, stone images, carved images, molten images—and false religious worship practices carried out on altars in groves or high places. These things will pollute those who come into contact with them. Jeremiah will later put it this way: "Learn not the way of the heathen" (Jeremiah 10:2, King James Version). If the children of Israel pollute themselves with the trappings of false worship, God warns that they, too, will be driven out of the Promised Land (Numbers 33:56).

As subsequent events will play out, however, Israel will not completely eradicate the pagan inhabitants of Canaan—and, sadly, will ultimately embrace idolatry, be overthrown, and be removed from the Promised Land just as God now warns them.

Ezra 1-2

Resolving the Differences in the Return Lists (Ezra 2; Nehemiah 7:5-72)

Ezra 2 lists those Jews enrolled in the return to the Promised Land under the Davidic prince Zerubbabel (apparently the Persian-appointed governor referred to in Ezra 1 as Sheshbazzar) and Jeshua or Joshua, the high priest (see Haggai 1:1; Zechariah 3:1). Nearly a century later, Nehemiah finds a register of those in the first return. While the lists are nearly the same, they are not exactly the same. How do we account for the discrepancies?

The Nelson Study Bible comments: “The people of the province [Ezra 2:1] refers to the Jewish people of Judah (see 5:8; Neh. 1:2, 3; 11:3). The use of this phrase probably indicates that the register of ch[apter] 2 was compiled in Babylon. Nehemiah’s list in Neh. 7:4-73 would have been compiled after he arrived in Jerusalem, which could account for some of the differences between the two registers.”

Ezra’s list gives the number of the family of Arah as 775 (2:5). The list in Nehemiah says the number was 652. Jamiesson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary states in its note on Ezra 2:5: “It is probable that all mentioned as belonging to this family repaired to the general place of rendezvous, or had enrolled their names at first as intending to go; but in the interval of preparation, some died, others were prevented by some sickness or insurmountable obstacles, so that ultimately no more than 652 came to Jerusalem.”

The same commentary later notes on the variations in general: “The discrepancy is sufficiently accounted for from the different circumstances in which the two registers were taken: that of Ezra having been made up at Babylon, while that of Nehemiah was drawn out in Judea, after the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt. The lapse of so many years might well be expected to make a difference appear in the catalogue, through death or other causes” (note on Nehemiah 7:5).

“To be sure,” says Gleason Archer in his *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, “regardless of the date when Nehemiah recorded this list (ca. 445 B.C.), his express purpose was to give the exact number of those who actually arrived at Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua back in 537 or 536 (Neh. 7:7). So also Ezra (in the 450s, apparently) recorded their numbers (2:1-2). But it may well be that Ezra used the earlier list of those who originally announced their intention to join the caravan of returning colonists back in Babylonia, whereas Nehemiah’s list reproduces the tally of those who actually arrived in Judea at the end of the long trek from Mesopotamia.

“In some cases there may well have been some individual families who at first determined to go with the rest and actually left their marshaling field (at Tel Abib, or wherever it may have been in Babylonia) under Zerubbabel and proceeded to the outskirts of that province before new factors arose to change their mind. They may have fallen into disagreement as to the advisability of all of them going at once with the initial group; others may have discovered business reasons to delay their departure until later. In some cases there may have been illness or death....

“In other cases there may have been some last-minute recruits from those who at first decided to remain in Babylonia. Perhaps they were caught up in the excitement of the return movement and joined the company of emigrants after the official tally had been taken at the marshaling grounds. Nevertheless, they made it safely back to Jerusalem, or wherever their ancestral town in Judea was, and were counted in the final list made up at the completion of the journey.

“Only four clans or city-groups came in with shrunken numbers (Arah, Zattu, the men of Bethel and Ai, and the men of Lod, Hadid, and Ono). All the rest picked up last minute recruits, varying from 1 (in the case of Azgad). It would be fascinating to know what special, emotional, or economic factors led to these last-minute decisions. At any rate, the differences in totals that do appear in these two tallies should occasion no surprise whatever. The same sort of augmentation and attrition has featured in every large migration in human history” (1982, pp. 229-230).

Archer also offers the possibility of copyist errors, but that consideration is unnecessary—and in fact unlikely given the number of variations. Indeed, one would think that scribes would have been scrupulous to check these figures given that there are two separate listings. It is more likely that there were legitimate differences in the original documents. Consider that Ezra is probably the one who compiled the books of Ezra and Nehemiah as one book. Why would he not have corrected any obvious errors? Ironically, the fact that there are differences in the lists is actually a proof of authenticity. No one fabricating the lists would have introduced such apparent discrepancies. These, then, obviously represent genuine historical documentation.

Details of the Returning Captives (Ezra 2; Nehemiah 7:5-72)

Looking at some of the details of the lists, it should be noted that the Nehemiah of Ezra 2:2 and Nehemiah 7:7 is not the same as the Nehemiah after whom the book of Nehemiah is named. Mordecai in the same verses was not the later Mordecai of the book of Esther. Nehemiah 7:7 lists an extra leader named Nahamani. Some maintain that the description “people of Israel” in these verses means all 12 tribes are indicated. Yet we have already seen that those returning were of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi (Ezra 1:5). Among the small remnant that returned to Judea from Babylon in this and subsequent returns, there were a few people whose

ancestors had migrated to Judah from the northern 10 tribes. Yet the vast majority of the people of the northern tribes remained scattered throughout this period—and they have not returned to the Promised Land to this day. The Jews, as the remnant of Israel, were appropriately designated as people of Israel. All Jews are Israelites. Yet, as has been amply demonstrated in past readings and comments, not all Israelites are Jews. The total number of returning priests was 4,289 (see 2:36-39; Nehemiah 7:39-42). This was around 10 percent of the total of those returning (see Ezra 2:64; Nehemiah 7:66). “The relatively high proportion of priests amongst those who returned was doubtless due to the prospect of a new Temple, with its opportunities of service” (New Bible Commentary: Revised, 1970, note on Ezra 2:36-39). On the other hand, the total number of returning Levites is surprisingly listed as just 341 or 380 (see Ezra 2:40-42; Nehemiah 7:43-45)—much less than the 24,000 Levites involved in the worship of God in David’s time (see 1 Chronicles 23:4). Why did so few come, particularly as compared with the priests? We don’t know, but perhaps it is significant that priests had leadership positions with a certain glory, whereas the temple duties of the other Levites may have been viewed with comparatively little excitement or prestige.

We then see a listing of the Nethinim and the sons of Solomon’s servants (Ezra 2:43-58; Nehemiah 7:46-60). “Nethinim means ‘Given Ones’ or ‘Dedicated Ones.’ In 1 Chr. 9:2, the Nethinim are distinguished from the priests and the Levites. Jewish tradition identifies the Nethinim with the Gibeonites who had been assigned by Joshua to assist the Levites in more menial tasks (see Josh. 9:27)... The sons of Solomon’s servants are linked with the Nethinim ([Ezra 2] v. 43). The numbers of the two groups are totaled together (see v. 58; Neh. 7:60)” (Nelson Study Bible, notes on Ezra 2:43-50, 55). The latter, according to The Expositor’s Bible Commentary’s note on Ezra 2:55, “may be the descendants of the Canaanites whom Solomon enslaved (1 Kings 9:20-21). But [another commentator]... argues that they were instead the descendants of the royal officers who were merchants in the service of Solomon (1 Kings 9:22, 27).”

It is interesting to observe the care with which the priesthood was guarded. People had to prove their genealogy to serve in it. Even those reckoned as priests yet without the documentary evidence were excluded from priestly service and entitlement until the Urim and Thummim could be consulted (see Ezra 2:59-63; Nehemiah 7:61-65). However, “the rabbis held that ‘since the destruction of the first temple the Urim and the Thummim ceased’ (Tosefta Sota 13.1). They held that Ezra 2:63 expressed, not a historical possibility, but an eschatological [end-time] hope (b. Sotah 48a-b). Elsewhere in the Talmud (b. Shebuoth 16a), we read that Ezra had to reconsecrate the temple without benefit of the Urim and Thummim” (Expositor’s, note on verse 63).

The word translated “governor” in verse 63 is transliterated as Tirshatha in the King James Version. This is “a Persian title, ‘the One to Be Feared,’ which approximates to ‘His Excellency’” (New Bible Commentary, note on verse 63).

The whole assembly totaled 42,360 (Ezra 2:64; Nehemiah 7:66). Yet the individual numbers listed in Ezra 2 add up to just 29,818. In Nehemiah 7 they add up to 31,089. “It is possible that the larger total [42,360] includes women, who are not named in the lists” (Nelson, note on verse 64). “Some believe the [unaccounted-for] 12,000 were women and/or children. If so, this may account for the many marriages to pagan women which [later] took place (cf. Ezra 8-10)” (Bible Reader’s Companion, note on Ezra 2:64).

Accompanying the 42,360 Jews were 7,337 slaves (verse 64; Nehemiah 7:67). “The ratio of slaves—one to six—is relatively high; that so many would return with their masters speaks highly of the relatively benevolent treatment of slaves by the Jews” (Expositor’s, note on verse 65). “The singers listed here were not the temple choir of [Ezra 2] v. 41. These were professional singers employed for banquets, feasts, and funerals (see 2 Chr. 35:25; Eccl. 2:7, 8). Their presence could be an indication of luxury (see 2 Sam. 19:35). It appears that many of the Jewish people had achieved some prosperity while living in Babylon.... The large number of horses listed here also suggests affluence among those who returned to Jerusalem. Prior to this time, horses in Israel had been used only for war and ceremonies. Only the very rich and well-armed owned horses. The rich also rode mules, for they were scarce in Israel.... The beasts of burden were camels and donkeys. Camels were expensive; the poorer classes rode donkeys” (Nelson, notes on Ezra 2:65, 66, 67).

On arriving in Judea, the people contribute gold, silver and garments for the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 2:68-69; Nehemiah 7:70-72). Yet the figures given in Ezra and Nehemiah don’t match. “Apparently Ezra’s list rounds off the figures, while Nehemiah’s list presents them in more precise detail. It is also possible that the two lists

give totals from different times of collection—perhaps in Babylon and then later in Jerusalem” (Nelson, note on Ezra 2:69). Or perhaps Ezra’s list, having larger numbers, presents the total from both times.

As before, an apparent discrepancy is a mark not of made-up storytelling by a forger of later centuries who would make sure to iron out such problems. Rather, this again is a mark of genuineness.

Finally, we should notice the money described here. As Expositor’s explains in its note on Ezra 2:69: “‘Drachmas’ translates the Hebrew darkemonim (cf. Neh 7:70-72). Another Hebrew word— adarkonim—is used for coins in Ezra 8:27 and 1 Chronicles 29:7. The ‘drachma’ was the Greek silver coin worth a day’s wage in the late fifth century B.C. More probably the coin intended here was the Persian daric, which was a gold coin, named either after Darius I, who began minting it, or after the Old Persian word for gold, dari. The coin was famed for its purity, which was guaranteed by the king. It was 98 percent gold with a 2 percent alloy for hardness. It was 3/4 of an inch in diameter and weighed 8.42 grams, or a little less than 1/3 of an ounce. Its value equaled the price of an ox or a month’s wages for a soldier. Since the coin was not in use until the time of Darius I (522-486 B.C.), its occurrence here in 537 B.C. has been labeled anachronistic. Its use is better viewed as a modernization by terms current at the time of the book’s composition of earlier values, perhaps the Median shekel. The total of 61,000 darics equals some 1,133 pounds of gold (about the same if the term represented the Greek drachma).”

Archaeology has recently lent support to the Jewish return from Babylon in the 6th centuries B.C. On February 20, 2004, an Associated Press article titled “Archaeologists find 2,500-year-old jewelry collection, makeup kit,” reported: “Israeli archaeologists excavating caves near the Dead Sea have discovered a rare find—a woman’s 2,500-year-old fashion accessories. The hoard of jewelry, a makeup kit and a small mirror apparently belonged to Jews who had returned from exile in Babylon in the 6th century B.C., said Tsvika Tsuk, chief archaeologist for the Israel Nature and Parks Authority. ‘This find is very rare. Both for the richness of the find and for that period, it is almost unheard of,’ Tsuk said on Friday. Hidden under a stone-like accumulation of sediment thrown up by a nearby spring, archaeologists using metal detectors found a necklace made of 130 beads of semiprecious stones and gold, a scarab, an agate medallion of Babylonian origin and a silver pendant with an engraved crescent moon and pomegranates. They also found what appears to be a makeup kit containing an alabaster bowl for powders, a stick to apply the makeup and a bronze mirror. Tsuk said they also discovered a pagan stamp showing a Babylonian priest bowing to the moon. ‘These finds confirm the (biblical) accounts of Jews returning from exile in Babylon,’ Tsuk said.... Tsuk said the find shows that there was a wealthy and flourishing community of returnees living in the area at the time. ‘These are not the belongings of a simple person,’ he said.”

1 Corinthians 15

The apostle proves the resurrection of Christ from the dead. (1-11) Those answered who deny the resurrection of the body. (12-19) The resurrection of believers to eternal life. (20-34) Objections against it answered. (35-50) The mystery of the change that will be made on those living at Christ’s second coming. (51-54) The believer’s triumph over death and the grave, An exhortation to diligence. (55-58)

The word resurrection, usually points out our existence beyond the grave. Of the apostle’s doctrine not a trace can be found in all the teaching of philosophers. The doctrine of Christ’s death and resurrection, is the foundation of hope. Remove this, and all our hopes for eternity sink at once. And it is by holding this truth firm, that believers stand in the day of trial, and are kept faithful to God. We believe in vain, unless we keep in the faith of the gospel. This truth is confirmed by Old Testament prophecies; and many saw Christ after he was risen. This apostle was highly favoured, but he always had a low opinion of himself, and expressed it. When sinners are, by Divine grace, turned into saints, God causes the remembrance of former sins to make them humble, diligent, and faithful. He ascribes to Divine grace all that was valuable in him. True believers, though not ignorant of what the Lord has done for, in, and by them, yet when they look at their whole conduct and their obligations, they are led to feel that none are so worthless as they are. All true believers believe that Jesus Christ, and him crucified, and then risen from the dead, is the substance of their Faith. All the apostles agreed in this testimony; by this faith they lived, and in this faith they died.

Having shown that Christ was risen, the apostle answers those who said there would be no resurrection. There had been no justification, or salvation, if Christ had not risen. And must not faith in Christ be vain, and of no use,

if he is still among the dead? The proof of the resurrection of the body is the resurrection of our Lord. Even those who died in the faith, had perished in their sins, if Christ had not risen. All who believe in Christ, have hope in him, as a Redeemer; hope for redemption and salvation by him; but if there is no resurrection, or future recompence, their hope in him can only be as to this life. And they must be in a worse condition than the rest of mankind, especially at the time, and under the circumstances, in which the apostles wrote; for then believers were hated and persecuted by all men. But it is not so; they, of all men, enjoy solid comforts amidst all their difficulties and trials, even in the times of the sharpest persecution.

All that are by faith united to Christ, are by his resurrection assured of their own. As through the sin of the first Adam, all men became mortal, because all had from him the same sinful nature, so, through the resurrection of Christ, shall all who are made to partake of the Spirit, and the spiritual nature, revive, and live for ever. There will be an order in the resurrection. Christ himself has been the first-fruits; at his coming, his redeemed people will be raised before others; at the last the wicked will rise also.

Then will be the end of this present state of things. Would we triumph in that solemn and important season, we must now submit to his rule, accept his salvation, and live to his glory. Then shall we rejoice in the completion of his undertaking, that God may receive the whole glory of our salvation, that we may for ever serve him, and enjoy his favour. What shall those do, who are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Perhaps baptism is used here in a figure, for afflictions, sufferings, and martyrdom, as Matthew 20:22,23. What is, or will become of those who have suffered many and great injuries, and have even lost their lives, for this doctrine of the resurrection, if the dead rise not at all? Whatever the meaning may be, doubtless the apostle's argument was understood by the Corinthians. And it is as plain to us that Christianity would be a foolish profession, if it proposed advantage to themselves by their faithfulness to God; and to have our fruit to holiness, that our end may be everlasting life. But we must not live like beasts, as we do not die like them. It must be ignorance of God that leads any to disbelieve the resurrection and future life. Those who own a God and a providence, and observe how unequal things are in the present life, how frequently the best men fare worst, cannot doubt as to an after-state, where every thing will be set to rights. Let us not be joined with ungodly men; but warn all around us, especially children and young persons, to shun them as a pestilence. Let us awake to righteousness, and not sin.

How are the dead raised up? that is, by what means? How can they be raised? 2. As to the bodies which shall rise. Will it be with the like shape, and form, and stature, and members, and qualities? The former objection is that of those who opposed the doctrine, the latter of curious doubters. To the first the answer is, This was to be brought about by Divine power; that power which all may see does somewhat like it, year after year, in the death and revival of the corn. It is foolish to question the Almighty power of God to raise the dead, when we see it every day quickening and reviving things that are dead.

To the second inquiry; The grain undergoes a great change; and so will the dead, when they rise and live again. The seed dies, though a part of it springs into new life, though how it is we cannot fully understand. The works of creation and providence daily teach us to be humble, as well as to admire the Creator's wisdom and goodness. There is a great variety among other bodies, as there is among plants. There is a variety of glory among heavenly bodies. The bodies of the dead, when they rise, will be fitted for the heavenly bodies. The bodies of the dead, when they rise, will be fitted for the heavenly state; and there will be a variety of glories among them. Burying the dead, is like committing seed to the earth, that it may spring out of it again.

Nothing is more loathsome than a dead body. But believers shall at the resurrection have bodies, made fit to be for ever united with spirits made perfect. To God all things are possible. He is the Author and Source of spiritual life and holiness, unto all his people, by the supply of his Holy Spirit to the soul; and he will also quicken and change the body by his Spirit. The dead in Christ shall not only rise, but shall rise thus gloriously changed. The bodies of the saints, when they rise again, will be changed. They will be then glorious and spiritual bodies, fitted to the heavenly world and state, where they are ever afterwards to dwell. The human body in its present form, and with its wants and weaknesses, cannot enter or enjoy the kingdom of God. Then let us not sow to the flesh, of which we can only reap corruption. And the body follows the state of the soul. He, therefore, who neglects the life of the soul, casts away his present good; he who refuses to live to God, squanders all he has.

All the saints should not die, but all would be changed. In the gospel, many truths, before hidden in mystery, are made known. Death never shall appear in the regions to which our Lord will bear his risen saints. Therefore let us seek the full assurance of faith and hope, that in the midst of pain, and in the prospect of death, we may think calmly on the horrors of the tomb; assured that our bodies will there sleep, and in the mean time our souls will be present with the Redeemer. Sin gives death all its hurtful power. The sting of death is sin; but Christ, by dying, has taken out this sting; he has made atonement for sin, he has obtained remission of it. The strength of sin is the law. None can answer its demands, endure its curse, or do away his own transgressions.

Hence terror and anguish. And hence death is terrible to the unbelieving and the impenitent. Death may seize a believer, but it cannot hold him in its power. How many springs of joy to the saints, and of thanksgiving to God, are opened by the death and resurrection, the sufferings and conquests of the Redeemer! In verse 58, we have an exhortation, that believers should be stedfast, firm in the faith of that gospel which the apostle preached, and they received. Also, to be unmovable in their hope and expectation of this great privilege, of being raised incorruptible and immortal. And to abound in the work of the Lord, always doing the Lord's service, and obeying the Lord's commands. May Christ give us faith, and increase our faith, that we may not only be safe, but joyful and triumphant.