

OpenTheo

July 20th: Ezra 8 & 2 Timothy 3

July 19, 2021



Alastair Roberts

Ezra gathers his company and travels to Jerusalem. Every Scripture is inspired by God.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>). My reflections are searchable by Bible chapter here: <https://audio.alastairadversaria.com/explore/>.

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Ezra 8. These are the heads of their father's houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylonia, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king, of the sons of Phineas, Gershom, of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel, of the sons of David, Hathosh, of the sons of Shekinah, who was of the sons of Perosh, Zechariah, with whom were registered 150 men, of the sons of Pehath-Moab, Eli-Ho-Enai, the son of Zerariah, and with him 200 men, of the sons of Zatu, Shekinah, the son of Jehaziel, and with him 300 men, of the sons of Aden, Ebed, the son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men, of the sons of Elam, Jeshia, the son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men, of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebediah, the son of Michael, and with him 80 men, of the sons of Joab, Obadiah, the son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men, of the sons of Benai, Shalomith, the son of Jezephiah, and with him 160 men, of the sons of Bebi, Zechariah, the son of Bebi, and with him 28 men, of the sons of Asgad, Johanan, the son of Hakatan, and with him 110 men, of the sons of

Adonikim, those who came later, their names being Eliphelet, Jewel, and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men, of the sons of Bigphi, Uthai, and Zakkir, and with them 70 men. I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava, and there we camped three days. As I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there none of the sons of Levi.

Then I sent for Eleazar, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshulam, leading men, and for Joirib and Elnathan, who were men of insight, and sent them to Iddo, the leading man at the place Cassiphia, telling them what to say to Iddo and his brothers, and the temple servants at the place Cassiphia, namely to send us ministers for the house of our God, and by the good hand of our God on us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Malai, the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely Sherubiah with his sons and kinsmen, 18. Also Hashabiah and with him Jeshiah of the sons of Merari, with his kinsmen and their sons, 20. Besides 220 of the temple servants, whom David and his officials had set apart to attend the Levites, these were all mentioned by name.

Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children, and all our goods. For I was ashamed to ask the king for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect us against the enemy on our way, since we had told the king, the hand of our God is for good on all who seek him, and the power of his wrath is against all who forsake him. So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests, Sherubiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their kinsmen with them, and I weighed out to them the silver and the gold and the vessels, the offering for the house of our God that the king and his counsellors and his lords, and all Israel there present, had offered. I weighed out into their hands six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels worth two hundred talents, and one hundred talents of gold, twenty bowls of gold worth one thousand arrocks, and two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as gold. And I said to them, You are holy to the Lord, and the vessels are holy, and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to the Lord, the God of your fathers.

Guard them, and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priests and the Levites and the heads of the fathers' houses in Israel at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the Lord. So the priests and the Levites took over the weight of the silver and the gold and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem, to the house of our God. Then we departed from the river Heber on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem.

The hand of our God was on us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy, and from ambushes by the way. We came to Jerusalem, and there we remained three days. On the fourth day, within the house of our God, the silver and the gold and the vessels

were weighed into the hands of Meremoth the priest, son of Uriah, and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas, and with them were the Levites, Jezobab the son of Jeshua, and Noodah the son of Biniuai.

The whole was counted and weighed, and the weight of everything was recorded. At that time those who had come from captivity, the returned exiles, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and as a sin offering, twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord.

They also delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps and to the governors of the province beyond the river, and they aided the people and the house of God. In Ezra chapter 8, Ezra playing the role of a sort of miniature Moses, leads a group of people from Babylonia back to Jerusalem. As in the book of Numbers, the group is divided by families and is counted.

The families mentioned here are also mentioned in Ezra chapter 2 verses 3 to 15. They are connected with the earlier migration. The reference to the sons of Adonaichim who came later, or who came last in verse 13, might be a reference to a whole family that had returned in these two migrations, the first part in the first migration and then those that remained in the second.

Among the numbers of those returning are two representative priests and also a descendant of David, Hathosh. Phineas was the son of Eleazar, who was the son who inherited the high priesthood from Aaron. In the return he was represented by Gershom.

Ithamar, the other son of Aaron, was represented by Daniel. Along with these men there were twelve lay families. Andrew Steinman notes that Pehath Moab was split in two.

The household of Joab, mentioned in verse 9, is also mentioned in chapter 2 verse 6. There he is mentioned as one of the two halves of the family of Pehath Moab. Altogether they number 1,512 men. There are twelve heads of the lay families.

There is Ezra, two representatives of the priestly families and a descendant of David. There was a slight possibility, given the focus on the number twelve throughout this passage, that we are supposed to see some significance in the fact that 1,512 is twelve times five cubed. When Israel first departed from Egypt they had left with around 600,000 people, ordered in fifties, which is twelve times ten to the power of three fifties.

The group gathered together around the river near Ahava. Encamped there for three days they prepared for the journey. During this time Ezra found that there were none of the sons of Levi among the company.

As he needed such a group among his company he sent a delegation to Caciphia to summon some qualified Levites. Commutators have speculated whether there was some sort of temple or site of Jewish worship at Caciphia, something that would have

explained why Ezra summoned people from them and why it is referred to as the place Caciphia. We know for instance of the existence of a Jewish temple at this period at Elephantine in Egypt.

Perhaps there were other sites in Babylonia. This of course raises difficult questions about how to relate this to the single site of worship that is spoken of in Deuteronomy. Were special allowances being made for diaspora communities for instance? Ezra hadn't sought for a band of soldiers and horsemen to protect the company.

Rather the company fasts and prays seeking that the Lord would give them the protection that they need. There are a lot of similarities between the story of Ezra's company and their journey towards Jerusalem and the story of the Exodus. But there are also several differences.

In the Exodus the children of Israel face military opposition. Military opposition from the Egyptians which has defeated the Red Sea and then military opposition from the Amalekites which the Lord also delivers them from. By contrast Ezra's company does not face military opposition.

However they are protected by the Lord. The Lord is their defence. In Ezra's company we see the character of this Exodus as one that is much more akin to a pilgrimage.

They are numbered like the children of Israel. There are priests and Levites specially charged with the management and the carrying of holy items. They leave around the time of Passover, two days before Passover on the twelfth day of the first month.

Similar to but not the same day as the departure from Egypt in the Exodus. Artaxerxes and presumably some rich private benefactors have entrusted to Ezra an immense quantity of riches. All of which has been dedicated to the service of the Lord in the temple.

Ezra commits this to the charge of twelve of the leading priests and ten of their relatives. They and the Levites must guard it until they reach Jerusalem where they will weigh it out to the priests and the leaders of the people in the chambers of the house of the Lord. After arriving in Jerusalem they wait for three days and then on the fourth day they weigh out all of the treasures to the leaders.

As a scrupulous and careful official Ezra ensures that everything is registered. At this time the returning company also offer a great number of sacrifices to the Lord. The number of sacrifices of the bulls, rams, lambs and goats can with the exception of the seventy seven lambs all be divided by twelve.

This along with other numbers in the chapter suggest that Ezra's company had a strong sense of themselves as representing all of Israel. Some variants of the text have seventy two instead of seventy seven lambs, a number that would be divisible by twelve.

However on textual grounds the number seventy seven does seem to be the one to be preferred.

Ezra's company also delivers commissions from the king to the satraps and the governors of the province beyond the river. The reference to plural satraps perhaps suggests the presence of satraps of other realms beyond that of the province of beyond the river or the trans-Euphrates. The instructions that they are being given presumably relate to the way that they are to treat Jews within their territories along with the support they should give to Ezra's mission.

A question to consider. In verse twenty two Ezra recounts his expression of confidence in the protection of the Lord to King Artaxerxes. In the prophets God had condemned his people for causing his name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles.

How in the return from exile are the Jews becoming a reason for Gentile people and nations to honour the Lord and his name? 2nd Timothy chapter three But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also opposed the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra, which persecutions I endured, yet from them all the Lord rescued me. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. In 2nd Timothy chapter 2 Paul had instructed Timothy concerning how he should address the problem of the false teachers. Now in chapter 3 he presents the false teachers within an eschatological framework.

They are living in the last days. The old covenant is about to come down in a few years time with the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and in this time between the times introduced by Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost, the world order is being radically shaken. And the shaking is increasing as they reach the end of this period, especially around the time that this letter is written, in the 60s AD.

Teaching concerning false teachers in such an eschatological framework is something that we see on a number of occasions within the New Testament, in places like 2nd Peter and Jude for instance. Also in 1st Timothy chapter 4 verses 1 to 3 Paul had made a similar point. Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

In the Olivet discourse Jesus had made similar claims, Matthew chapter 24 verses 9 to 13, Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another, and many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold, but the one who endures to the end will be saved.

In this epistle we get a sense of Paul's own experience bearing this out. He's been abandoned by a great many in Asia, and in the following chapter we read of people like Demas, whose faith has been abandoned for the sake of the world. As the eschatological horizon approaches, it is clear that they are living in perilous times.

Wickedness has a freer reign and is expressing itself in more intense forms. Paul provides a lengthy vice list characterising some of the people that are arising in these times. We might compare such a list to that which we find in Romans chapter 1 verses 29 to 31.

They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

As in Romans chapter 1, the list here plays with particular sounds, from disobedient to parents to not loving good. All of the words begin with the letter alpha, save for the term slanderous. As a list, it moves smoothly from the tongue and lodges in the ear.

The characterisation begins with the disordered loves of these people. They love self and money. As Paul had noted in 1 Timothy chapter 6, the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

From their disordered loves, Paul proceeds to their pride and boastfulness. From these traits, a torrent of sinful behaviour flows forth. In the list that Paul gives, we get a sense that these people are characterised by virtually every single kind of sin.

They are cruel and implacable. They are opposed to reconciliation. They slander.

They cannot control themselves and are like brute beasts. They have no love for what is good. They are impulsive and impetuous.

They betray those that would rely upon them. They are self-important, filled with ungodliness, and utterly devoid of the gratitude that should be a distinguishing feature of the people of God. Verse 4 concludes by characterising them as lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, perhaps harkening back to the beginning of the list in verse 2 where they are described as lovers of self.

Surprisingly, at the beginning of verse 5 they are described as having the appearance of godliness. Despite all of these vices, these persons are maintaining a facade of righteousness, and many around them seem to be taken in by them. Timothy, however, needs to recognise such people.

He needs to have a sense of where they fit into the eschatological framework and he needs to be careful to avoid them. The last days are a time of great testing. In the times of testing the hearts of people can be revealed, and the false teachers and their teaching are one form that this testing can take.

These false teachers, Timothy's opponents, seem to be having success in certain contexts, particularly with some foolish and spiritually compromised women. We might get a sense of the dynamics by which such false teaching spread in other parts of the pastoral epistles. In Titus chapter 1 verse 11, they must be silenced since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

The false teachers, like the serpent with Eve, seem to be focusing upon uninformed women as the weakest link. Through leading astray such women, the women spread the false teaching, and whole communities can become compromised. Perhaps such a spread of the false teaching is also seen in a place like 1 Timothy chapter 5 verse 13.

Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. The women described here are burdened with sins and led astray by various passions. In Paul's understanding it is their sinfulness that makes them susceptible to the false teaching.

Perhaps what they are looking for is teaching that flatters their desires, and the false teachers, as they are doing this for money, are only too happy to flatter the desires of their hearers. They will likely be paid far more handsomely as a result. There will always be a market for teachers who tickle their hearers' ears.

However, such women are doomed to futility in their quest for the truth. As they have no appetite for the truth, their appetites lead them astray, moving them away from the truth, rather than closer toward it. Likewise, if they are seeking to learn from these false teachers, they are doomed to continued and increasing ignorance.

The false teachers have nothing true to share with them. Indeed, further time spent at their feet will only result in the hearers taking on some of the manifold vices of the teachers. Paul compares these false teachers to Janis and Jambres, names that the tradition had given to key magicians that had stood against Moses and Aaron from Pharaoh's court.

Just as the magicians had not stood long or successfully against Moses and Aaron, so these teachers will be shown up, revealed in their true character. It will only be a matter of time before their folly is revealed to everyone. In contrast to such false teachers, infected as they are with many vices, Timothy needs to devote himself to a very different pattern of behaviour, and he will learn that pattern from Paul.

Paul lists a number of different ways in which he provides an example. In his teaching, he provides a model of setting forth the truth, forthrightly, powerfully, with integrity and with clarity. Paul's behaviour, his commitment and his devotion in his life, his Christian virtues of faith, patience, love and steadfastness, all provide patterns for Timothy.

Paul has described Timothy as his son in the faith. As a son, Timothy is to follow the pattern of his father. In 1 Corinthians 4, verse 17, we see Timothy described in a way that suggests that he has done this.

That is why I sent you, Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere, in every church. In verses 11 and 12, we see that Paul especially wants to spotlight persecutions and sufferings. Suffering has been a continued theme within the second epistle to Timothy.

We see it in chapter 1, verses 11 and 12, Also in chapter 2, verse 3, In verses 8 to 10 of that chapter, Timothy was already well aware of Paul's sufferings. As Paul mentions here, Timothy had followed them. He had met Paul during the second missionary journey at Lystra and Iconium, which helps to explain why Paul mentions the suffering that he experienced in those places here.

Such suffering is a sign of the Lord's love for the people of Israel. Such suffering is what should be expected by all those who follow Christ. The world, the flesh and the devil are set against them and they will have to struggle against all of these forces.

There is an antagonism between light and darkness, between this age and the age to come. At the end of verse 11, Paul might be alluding to Psalm 34, verses 17 to 19. Paul warns Timothy that the evils and the opposition that they face will only increase as the

eschatological horizon nears.

They are living in the last days and as a result they should not be surprised to find lawlessness abounding. In such a situation, Timothy needs to dig in. He needs to re-entrench himself within the things that he already knows.

He needs to remind himself of the old lessons and he needs to draw from his deepest roots. He was taught in the Christian faith by his mother and his grandmother. Keeping them in mind and the example of the apostle who had been like a father to him, he must steel himself for the coming struggle.

As Paul is seeing so many people falling away, being picked off or otherwise failing in this hour of crisis, he is concerned to encourage Timothy to exercise boldness as he faces the future. Now is the time when Timothy's true mettle will be proved. The apostle especially singles out the scriptures as that which Timothy must ground himself in.

Timothy has learned the scriptures, the Old Testament scriptures, from his early childhood and it is these scriptures that prepare one to exercise faith in Christ. In a theologically important statement, Paul expresses the usefulness of the scriptures for Timothy's task. The scriptures are described as breathed out by God, or in word in the Greek.

This is why we talk about inspiration. The concept here also connects the scriptures closely with the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1, verse 21, expresses a similar point.

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The meaning of this statement is not entirely clear. It could be read all scripture, referring to the whole body of the scriptures, or it could be read as every scripture, each individual text or passage.

Scholars also debate whether we should understand it as saying that every scripture is inspired by God and useful, or that every scripture that is inspired by God is also useful. It seems to me that on balance it is more likely that we should understand this as every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness. The reference is not to scripture as a whole body.

The scriptures were spoken of in the preceding verse in a plural form. Here it is singular, which suggests to me that it is more likely to be referring to individual scriptures. Each and every scripture is inspired and therefore profitable.

And each inspired scripture, and the inspired scriptures as a whole, prepare the man of God, the Christian minister, for all the work that he needs to do. For teaching, the task of elucidating the truth and instruction within it, for reproof, for addressing the false teachers and opponents, for correction, for exposing and revealing their errors, and for training in righteousness. Besides the inspiration of scripture, a further thing that the

final verses of this chapter bring out is the sufficiency of the scripture.

It is the scripture that enables the man of God to be complete and to be equipped for every good work. In the scripture, all the instruction that we need to serve God faithfully has been given to us. A question to consider.

What other statements in scripture can help us in developing a doctrine of scripture?