

EZRA . . . who refused to be swayed by sentiment
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(EZRA 2:62)

The flags were flying among the Babylonian hovels, for the impossible dream of the captives had come true: their slavery had terminated. Every hour fresh rumours were circulating among the dismal homes, and the young men's enthusiasm seemed boundless. Their revered leader Ezra was actively engaged in high level conferences, and it seemed evident that once the chaotic conditions of the conquered city were under control, emancipation would become a reality. Many of the younger people had been born in captivity, but older folk remembered a little of the bygone days, and sighed at the thought of their homegoing. Then came the news that the final arrangements had been made, and each family was commanded to report at the registration offices.

An Undisturbed Complacency

"And the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Koz, the children of Barzillai; which took a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and were called after their name. These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood" (Ezra 2: 61, 62). And the unexpected disturbance around the registration booth surely caused a great amount of unpleasantness. The great leader refused to be swayed by sentiment, and neither argument nor tears could move him from his determination to reject these applicants. Their claim to belong to the priesthood had been most sincere; but the records of Israel had been faithfully kept, and in these could be found no mention of their names. The leader said that he was very sorry, but the families would have to stand aside until higher authorities could be consulted. What a pity these folk had not ascertained beforehand whether or not their claims could be substantiated. They had lived among the people of God, and had assumed that their names were entered in the records. Now, when it was too late to remedy matters, they had discovered their great mistake. And in like manner, people today assume all will be well in the day of judgment, and yet never attempt to ascertain whether their hopes are based on reliable facts.

An Unsupported Claim

What reply would be made when Ezra enquired, "Why did you not assure yourselves in days gone by that your claims could be substantiated?" Probably they shrugged their shoulders and made excuses. Charles Haddon Spurgeon is credited with the statement, "There will be three outstanding wonders in heaven. (i) People will be present whom I never expected to find. (ii) People will be absent whom I did expect to find. (iii) The greatest wonder will be that I shall be there." Perhaps we could add to the list and say, "There will be many people absent who expected to be there." Supposition that all will be well at the termination of life's journey can be totally misleading and disappointing. Concerning the final assize, the Bible declares that all whose names are not found in the Lamb's book of life will be rejected (Rev. 20: 11-15). "The Lord knoweth them that are His," and the names of all His people are recorded in the great book. A man

EZRA . . . who refused to be swayed by sentiment should never rest until he is assured that this important matter has been satisfactorily concluded.

An Unexpected Catastrophe

therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood." The Scriptures are silent concerning any further investigation which may or may not have been made. It is not impossible that further research brought additional evidence to light, and that the tragedy of rejection was ultimately averted. On the other hand, such evidence may not have been forthcoming, and the disappointment of the rejected families would then have been overwhelming. And this is a reminder of the greater issues at stake in the salvation of men and women. There are many people who live and work among Christians, who yet never worry about making their own decision for Christ. They live complacently from day to day, satisfied with the assumption that all must be well. Yet the Scriptures declare that unless their names are recorded in heaven, their most sincere expectation will end in disappointment. The journey into eternity demands preparation, and to neglect this urgent matter is to run the risk of losing everything of value both in this world and in the world to come.

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