

# Ezra 8 - God Prepares Ezra

Go ahead and be turning to Ezra chapter 8...

## Ezra 8:1-14

**1** These are the heads of their fathers' houses, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylonia, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king: **2** Of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom. Of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel. Of the sons of David, Hattush. **3** Of the sons of Shecaniah, who was of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah, with whom were registered 150 men. **4** Of the sons of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerariah, and with him 200 men. **5** Of the sons of Zattu, Shecaniah the son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men. **6** Of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men. **7** Of the sons of Elam, Jeshaiiah the son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men. **8** Of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael, and with him 80 men. **9** Of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men. **10** Of the sons of Bani, Shelomith the son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men. **11** Of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah, the son of Bebai, and with him 28 men. **12** Of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men. **13** Of the sons of Adonikam, those who came later, their names being Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men. **14** Of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zaccur, and with them 70 men.

Genealogies are hard. Their full of peoples' names, yet they're highly IMPERSONAL. Just a LOG of names and numbers. In the previous chapter, Ezra tells us that...

## Ezra 7:28b

**...I took courage, for the hand of the Lord my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.**

These were LEADERS of families AND everyone who went up from Babylonia with them. Remember that part about Ezra "**taking courage;**" we'll come back to it later. After this detailed accounting of everyone in the traveling party, Ezra tells us...

## Ezra 8:15-20

**15** 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. **16** Then I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, leading men, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, who were men of insight, **17** and sent them to Iddo, the leading man at the place Casiphia, telling them what to say to Iddo and his brothers and the temple servants at the place Casiphia, namely, to send us ministers for the house of

our God. 18 And by the good hand of our God on us, they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli the son of Levi, son of Israel, namely Sherebiah with his sons and kinsmen, 18; 19 also Hashabiah, and with him Jeshaiiah of the sons of Merari, with his kinsmen and their sons, 20; 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.

So they gathered at the river that ran to a place called Ahava ("I shall subsist"). Scholars can't tell us where that was, but we know the people camped there **THREE DAYS**.

THREE days...when you see the **NUMBER THREE** or something repeated **THREE TIMES** in the Bible, **TAKE NOTE**. The specific **ESSENCE** of something is being **EMPHASIZED** ("Holy! Holy! Holy!"), or its **COMPLETENESS** is being **EMPHASIZED** (like Jesus' time in the heart of the earth).

What did Ezra do for three days? The "**reviewed the people.**" HE WAS MAKING SURE HE HAD EVERYONE! He was making sure the party was COMPLETE, and what did he find? It wasn't! He had NO LEVITES.

Now, understand. The whole purpose of Ezra's mission was to **TEACH THE LAW** of God, and the **LEVITES** were to **FUNCTION** as **TEACHERS** of the Law. You can see why this was a **BIG PROBLEM!**

I mean, you kind of wonder how in the world had he got to this point while still missing such a **VITAL COMPONENT?!**

I think about how I used to help **MAINTAIN THE GROUNDS** when I worked at the camp, which just means that I did a **TON** of **WEED EATING**, and I was the Office Manager! Man, I did so much weed eating!

During the summer, when our team was larger, we'd have weed eating **CREWS**, and to make the most of the workday, we **MADE SURE EVERYTHING READY** the day before. We checked the **OIL** in all the weed eaters, made sure they all had plenty of **LINE**, **GASSED** them up, made sure we had plenty of **MIXED FUEL** in the cans, and so forth.

Ezra's snafu of having no Levites on a mission to teach the Law of God in the Land would have been like showing up to weed eat **WITHOUT WEED EATERS!** They were crucial to his mission.

So, what happened? Did God **FORGET** that Ezra needed Levites? NO.

Why didn't He send them as part of the group who decided to return to the Land? Was God purposefully making things **DIFFICULT** for Ezra? NO.

So, what was going on? When you feel God leading you to do something, **BUT YOU CAN'T SEE ALL THE PIECES COMING TOGETHER**, what does that cause you to do?

For some, it will cause them to **QUESTION** their understanding of God's will. *"Maybe I got it wrong, and God's NOT in this after all."*

For others who know that the task truly is God's will, it could bring **DISCOURAGEMENT**. *"Yeah, this is God's will, but I can't do it. It's too much for me."*

But is it God's goal to discourage us as we seek Him? Every now and then, does He just want to crush us? NO! But He does want us to know that we can't do it without Him.

God lets us **LACK** so we'll **LEAN** in to Him.

God knew what Ezra needed, but **HE WAITED TO SUPPLY IT** until after Ezra noticed his lack and leaned into Him for provision. God did this time and again throughout the scriptures...

### **Genesis 2:18**

**Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.**

He didn't make him a helper, though, until He'd paraded all the pairs of the animal kingdom in front of him, showing him that he was the only one without a mate. The Lord made Him a helper, but she came from God. God "**brought her to the man**," showing him that, more than anything or anyone else, **ADAM NEEDED HIM**.

### **Genesis 12:1**

**Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.**

Abram: "Sure thing, God!" (Gets ready to go...) "Where we going?"

God: "I'll tell you when you get there."

Abram: :|

God told Him to **GO**, but He didn't give Him everything! **ABRAM HAD TO DEPEND ON GOD.**

Later on, a descendant of Abraham found himself standing before Pharaoh. It was **SHOWTIME!**

#### **Genesis 42:15-16**

**15 And Pharaoh said to Joseph, I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it. 16 Joseph answered Pharaoh, It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.**

Pharaoh demanded an interpretation from Joseph, but Joseph said he didn't have it. **GOD DID.**

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul described his **QUALIFICATIONS** for serving the Lord, saying...

#### **2 Corinthians 3:4-6**

**4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, 6 who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.**

We're not enough, and praise the Lord, we don't have to be! Our **SUFFICIENCY** is from God! He makes us **COMPETENT!** And Paul was only echoing the teaching of Christ when He said...

#### **John 15:5**

**I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.**

We see that Ezra's lack caused him to **LEAN IN** to God. You can see that he was depending on God because, when He bought the 38 Levites and the 220 Temple servants, he rejoiced saying that it was because of "**the good hand of our God on us.**" He gave God the credit.

When you know that something you're doing or going through is God's will, but you don't yet see everything you need to do it, **REJOICE!** It's part of the **PROCESS!** Lean into Him. He's **GROWING YOU!**

Well, the Levite problem was resolved, but was God done working in Ezra? Nope. Time to grow some more. Ezra said...

### Ezra 8:21-23

21 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. 22 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. 23 So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.

If you add up the people listed in this chapter, including the Levites and Temple servants he'd just found, the number of **MEN** traveling back was **1,772**. That's just the men, but these men had families. Adding in wives and children, that number could have been as many as **FOUR OR FIVE THOUSAND PEOPLE**.



These weren't soldiers making the 800 MILE march to Jerusalem; they were families with small **children** and the **elderly**. Soldiers probably could have made the trip in less than **FOUR MONTHS**, but it took this group this long.

Ezra knew it was a **DANGEROUS** trip, so he sought the Lord's protection, the Word says, for themselves, their **CHILDREN**, and their **GOODS**.

OH, YEAH! They were also transporting **LARGE QUANTITIES OF GOLD AND SILVER**. Ezra tells us how much. He said...

### Ezra 8:26-27

**26 I weighed out into their hand 650 talents of silver, and silver vessels worth 200 talents, and 100 talents of gold, 27 20 bowls of gold worth 1,000 darics, and two vessels of fine bright bronze as precious as gold.**

Now, in case those figures don't mean much, allow me to convert them for you...

The **650 talents of silver** equates to **24.5 TONS of silver** (\$13,475,000.00 as of August 2019)

The silver vessels worth 200 talents, and the 100 of gold equals another **3.75 TONS of EACH.**

(\$176,437,500.00)

The 20 gold bowls worth 1,000 darics comes to another **19 POUNDS** of gold. (\$558,250.40)

TODAY, that's over \$190 MILLION worth of precious metals.

So, robbing this bunch of returning exiles would have been **LIKE ROBBING AN ARMORED TRUCK**, but armored trucks have guards. Swap out the guards for families with little kids, and it's **MORE LIKE A MINIVAN** carrying all that wealth. Calling them a **SOFT TARGET** for bandits is an understatement.

Ezra could have really used the king's soldiers and horsemen, but he said...

#### **Ezra 8:22**

**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.**

Ezra was "ashamed" to ask for protection SINCE he had affirmed to the king that "**The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him...**" He wasn't ashamed for making such a claim, but now he looked like this guy...



He had **PAINTED** himself **INTO A CORNER!** It wasn't that he didn't *want* the king's protection. As he looked into the faces of the men, women, and children he was leading back on this perilous journey, *he probably wished he had it!* Yet, if he'd gone back to the king and asked for protection after that boast, you know the king would have responded, "*I thought you were trusting God.*" To have asked the king for such protection would have shown him and everyone else that **EZRA DIDN'T REALLY BELIEVE WHAT HE'D SAID.**

Now, I LOVE Ezra! As Dale taught last week, he prepared his heart to **KNOW** the Word and to **LIVE** it, which carried out to completion means to **TEACH** others to do the same. Such commitment is **INSPIRING!** Truly, he's an **UNSUNG HERO!** Scholars attribute to him the rigorous **SCRIBAL TRADITION**, which is to say that he's the guy God used to preserve the accuracy of the Word you hold in your hand. Many credit Ezra with instituting the **SYNAGOGUE** system; he believed every community needed its own copy of the Word and a place to gather to be taught from it. There are even those who believe he's **THE AUTHOR OF** the psalm that's fully given to exalting the Word, **Psalms 119.**

Ezra is **AMAZING**, but **THIS PASSAGE IS NOT A GOOD LOOK FOR HIM.** Oh, wait. That's right. He's also **HUMAN**, and it's to our benefit that the Holy Spirit inspired him to include this less than shining moment in his records. Having made such a boast, Ezra was now **CONFRONTED** with the question of whether or not he truly believed it.

It makes us ask ourselves: **DO I REALLY BELIEVE THE THINGS I CLAIM TO BELIEVE???**

For instance, **WE CLAIM THAT HEAVEN AWAITS** us at the end of our days as believers. We claim that the eternal rewards of living for Jesus are better and more real than the temporary

blessings of this life, but if that's the case, why do we live like this place is the focus? *And I'm talking to ME!*

I've shared this quote with you before, but it warrants repeating. John White observed that **"it is want of faith that makes us opt for earthly rather than heavenly treasure. If we really believed in celestial treasures, who among us would be so stupid as to buy gold? We just do not believe. Heaven is a dream, a religious fantasy which we affirm because we are orthodox. If people believed in heaven, they would spend their time preparing for permanent residence there. But nobody does."**

Do we believe what we say?

We claim that **GOD IS IN CONTROL**, that **HE KNOWS** about my situation, and that **HE'S GOOD**, but what happens when life goes sideways? If we BELIEVE it, we REST in Him WITHOUT FEAR, praising Him for His never ending goodness. If we can't do that, it's likely that our previous claims are **BANKRUPT**.

Now, does that mean that there will never be **MOMENTS** of **WORRY** and **UNEASINESS**? NO, but when they come, we'll take them to Him. It's in those *desperate* times in which we're *shaken* that we must cry out to Jesus like the father of the demon possessed little boy, **"I believe; help my unbelief!"**

There are many people walking around **fearfully SHAKEN** right now because of a virus or other circumstances; it's as if **they've forgotten that GOD HOLDS THEM IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND**.

*"God butchered His Son to save my eternal soul from Hell, but I'm not sure if He's going to take care of me through THIS."*

You here tonight, you watching online, **have you forgotten who holds you?** If you're living in fear, it's probably because you're informed more by the world and your circumstances than by the Word.

**Do we believe** the things about God that we claim to believe, or are our claims, as John White said, **"religious fantasy"** that we affirm because we're Christians?



I'll tell you this, if you want to believe these things, **DON'T BE SURPRISED** when the Lord allows **situations** to come along that **force** you to lean into those convictions.

That's what happened to Ezra. The king's security was looking pretty good, but he was ashamed to ask after making such a boast of the Lord. Oh, he said he believed the Lord would protect them, but as they were preparing to depart from Ahava with great riches, families and children, and no warriors, it was **DECISION TIME**.

Are you **LIVING** like you truly believe what you claim to believe?

If your mouth says "Yes," but your life says, "I don't know," **lovingly, it's time to grow**, and know that **you're in good company**. It's the same situation in which Ezra found Himself. So, what did he do to settle this in his heart? He and the Nation **PREPARED THEMSELVES** at Ahava through a **FAST**.

I'm not going to intimately detail the topic of fasting, but I will share this. It's from the InterVarsity Press [Bible Background Commentary](#), and I like the way they described it. It says...

**"The principle [of fasting] is that the importance of the request causes an individual to be so concerned about his or her spiritual condition that physical necessities fade into the background."**

God was the only way they were going to make it safely to Jerusalem, so **their relationship with Him became the most important thing in life**. The truth is, that's the case every moment of our lives, but we recognize it most readily in the tough times, don't we?

Ezra and the rest of the travelers prepared their hearts to act on the belief that **"The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him,"** and they **SOUGHT** the Lord through fasting.

How are you seeking Him? What **SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES** are you **CULTIVATING** in your life that keep you growing closer to Him, especially when you don't feel like it? **Are you in the Word** each day? Do you **meditate** on it, asking the Holy Spirit to teach it to you and to help you live it? Do you talk with Him in **prayer**?

Tonight, as we've talked about **NEEDING LEVITES** and **NEEDING PROTECTION**, you could get the impression that this passage is all about **GOD'S PROVISION**, and to a degree it is. God provided. However, I see a greater theme here, and that's the theme of **OUR PREPARATION**.

It was **NO ACCIDENT** that Ezra was lacking Levites for this mission. It was part of God's **PROCESS** to **GROW HIM!**

After finding a solution for that problem, he was confronted with another. Did He really believe that **"The hand of our God is for good on all who seek him"** enough to head out with no security but God? In the Nehemiah study, you'll see that Nehemiah got an armed escort to Jerusalem. It doesn't seem fair, but you see, **Ezra and Nehemiah were different people**, and as such, what they needed to grow was different. God was preparing EZRA for the trials he would face in the future, trials that he wouldn't have been ready for if he'd bypassed these.

Remember earlier when it said that Ezra **"took courage?"** Chapter seven was all about God miraculously moving in the heart of the king to initiate this mission. Ezra was blown away! He praised God saying...

#### **Ezra 7:27-28**

**27 Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, who put such a thing as this into the heart of the king, to beautify the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, 28 and who extended to me his steadfast love before the king and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty officers. I took courage, for the hand of the Lord my God was on me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.**

Having seen the Lord do something so amazing, Ezra **"took courage."** HE GREW A LITTLE! Then a problem arose, and then another. It was time for Ezra to grow some more.

We learn to take courage in the Lord as we encounter uncomfortable, even frightful, situations that give God an opportunity to show what He can and will do for those who trust Him. Don't try to avoid them. Reflect on all the Lord has already done in your life and take courage. Trust Him and keep going. Let Him grow you.