

# COMING HOME

## A STUDY OF EZRA



### EZRA: Coming Home

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Scripture Reference: Ezra 8:21–8:23, Ezra 8:31–8:32

The book of Ezra is rarely taught and almost never taught verse by verse few miracles happen, few notable figures emerge, and yet it is integral to God's unfolding narrative and rescue plan for his people. Join Doxa as we unpack the physical and spiritual rebuilding that happens in the old Testament book of Ezra for more information about our gatherings and how we make disciples in the everyday stuff of life, go to [doxa-church.com](http://doxa-church.com) or find us on Instagram at @DOXA.

Good morning, Doxa family. We are going to be reading from Ezra chapter eight verses 21 through 23 and verses 31 and 32. The, I proclaimed to fast there at the river Ahava that we might humble ourselves before our God to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, for 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 jumping to verse 31-32. Then we departed from the river Ahava on the 12th 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. This is the word of the Lord. Please be seated.

All right, good morning again, Doxa. I want to beat Tim out. Come on. Good morning, Doxa. All right. I want to give a shout out to Rusty, not just because he beautifully presented and, and gave the word of, uh, God in the ministry of the word here. Rusty is one of the amazing leaders in our deaf ministry. And, um, I want to challenge the church here to get the word out. I want you to talk to your neighbors. I want you to talk to your coworkers, anybody who's deaf, get the word out. That Doxa has an amazing deaf ministry, servants, beautiful people, our brothers and sisters.

Okay. So get the word out now with that. The deaf ministry needs workers. Okay. So if you know anybody alright, that can interpret. And I think even, maybe there's some young people here or other people that maybe it's time to learn ASL and be a part of a ministry. Okay. So that might be a cool thing that God's calling you to. All right. So really thank you guys. We love you. Um, thanks, Rusty. All right. Also want to give a shout out to the Maple Valley Missional Community group.

Um, if you've been greeted with a nice, beautiful, warm smile in any of our buildings over the last seven years, most likely they're a part of that missional community group. All right. Love you guys. All right. Um, I'm not Eddie. Okay. I know sometimes there's con uh, confusion <laugh> but to help you out, I'm the guy with the gray hair. Okay. So yeah, if we haven't met, my name is Josh and I'm one of the elders here at Doxa and, um, I'm just really excited to be here to be able to preach. Okay. And along with Tim and all the other elders and leaders, my passion and my love is that we get to gather and that we, we can lift up the name of Jesus and give him glory. Right. That's what Doxa means is God's glory. And so thank you. And secondly, we can come together and we can be equipped, empowered to be able to go out wherever we are, to be witnesses of Jesus, a world that desperately needs him as Tim shared that this be a physical place where God can do the supernatural.

Okay. So thank you so much now, uh, shameless plug. I want to introduce my family up here. All right. Um, this is my wife, Crystal, my son's Brendan, Evan, and Max. And I don't just put that up there to brag. Put that picture up there to say, thank you, cuz for the, for the past seven years here at Doxa, you guys there's been so many people that have invested and poured into and loved with their gifts Crystal and I and my boys. Okay. So whether it's Doxa kids, Doxa students, I can look at my family and say, wow, thank you Lord, for the body that has poured into and loved my family. All right. So thank you so much. Um, so I work for slalom consulting and I'm currently with, um, some teams at T-Mobile, uh, my wife, Crystal, she works for east side integrative primary care as a nutritionist.

And so we know what it's like to be growing and striving to be witnesses to the people around us. So thanks for your encouragement. And as we encourage each other to do that, all right. Um, Crystal and I have been involved in several different ministries here at Doxa over the past seven years. And I just wanna share some of our favorite, uh, times of ministry has been with the premarital mentoring process. Um, we've worked with some great couples over the years. We've tried to scare 'em a little bit. We kind of try to sift them out a little bit before they get married. Um, but no, really it's about encouraging them, laying out God's word as they prepare for marriage. We love that. But the other cool thing about that ministry is Crystal and I will walk away sometimes and be like, we need to be doing that ourselves in our marriage.

Right. Right. So God just works in those, uh, amazing ways. All right. So we've been going through our study in the book of Ezra. All right. And I'm really excited to open up this text. And so if you have your Bible, we're gonna be in Ezra chapter eight. Okay. Now we're at the point in the, in the story where we finally see God's people coming home and that's the whole focus of this series in Ezra. God's people coming home. Now some of you might ask, well, wait a second. We've been going through a number of weeks and we've already heard of the people coming home and there's temple and whatnot. Well, we have to remember that Ezra is not linear. It kind of just moves everywhere. All right. It's kinda like that show. This is us where it's like, wait a second. It's baby Randall, wait it's adult Randall. Wait, is this Jack in Vietnam? Wait, is it haven't

we been here? Haven't we been here like six times. So if you haven't seen this as us, you gotta ask someone to summarize it for you because you'll be okay just without summary. But if your wife is asking you to watch it submit, die to yourself. <laugh> but buckle up cuz there's like eight seasons and it's still going, okay. <laugh> now I love you, babe.

Um, I want to do some critical con or some important context for today. Now Ezra is calling people out of exile, back into their intended place. And this exile has been brutal. Can you imagine being plucked, basically kidnapped, forced out of your culture, out of your comfort, out of your family, out of your heritage and pulled and pulled into a situation. 70 years of exile, that's a br-- a brutal experience, horrible memories, generations that have been broken apart. Families torn. For these people the concept of home is this big question. Where is home? What is my identity? Who is my God? Who am I as an Israelite? What is Jerusalem? So this is the context we see as Ezra is calling his people. And as a prophet, Ezra is calling on behalf of God for the people to come home. So let's pray before we get into chapter eight, father, God, I thank you for this morning.

Just thank you for this new day. You've given us. I thank you for this opportunity that we can gather that we can lift up your name, that we can hear your word and Lord, would you transform us with your word? Not just give us new information. Holy spirit. I know that there's, um, areas in our lives that you're gonna work with this morning. Not just through what I say, but just the fact that holy spirit you're moving in your people. And so Lord, we give this time to you. We submit to you. We need you Lord. And we just proclaim you as beautiful. We proclaim you as glorious Lord. Amen. Amen.

So now in Ezra chapter eight, we see Ezra as at, is at a critical point. This is a serious juncture. Okay? Now he's been working hard over the years to remind people and point people to God and his ways and his law. He's been pointing them to this eventual return home from exile. But can you imagine kind of where he's at? Imagine this is a big moment. God is calling him to bring his people home. There's this weight on his shoulders. But remember he's faced with the people that are disillusioned. They're discouraged. Maybe there's, uh, complacency in a lot of 'em like, Hey, maybe it's just better to stay in exile. Ezra has fear of the future, his fear for his own life. If they make this journey, there's enemies after them. And he's faced with opposition within himself, his own people and opposition from the outside. And so this morning, I want you to consider this question when God is calling you, what is your response in times of fear and opposition? When God is calling you, what is your response in times of fear and opposition?

You see, it's not a question of if God's calling you, whether you're a Christian or not, God is calling and it's serious that right at this very moment, the truth is right at this very moment in your seat, out in the lobby, watching online, God is calling you because we're all created in God's image. Whether we know it or not, we're all created on--in God's image. We have his essence, his fingerprint, his DNA. And what that does is it gives us this connection, no matter what, who we are, we have this connection with God so that he can call us that we can, we can be in relationship with him. And so if you're not a Christian, there's no accident that you're here. If you're not a Christian, God is stirring something up in you, something greater, something bigger. You see the fractured nature of this world in your life.

And you're hearing of this Jesus he's working. And for those of us that are Christians, we've been walking with Christ for some time. And we know that the life of a Christian is a life of God

calling us constantly, right? He calls, he calls us through his word, the Bible, as we read it, as it's preached, as we speak it to one another in community, also in community, as we pray for each other, he can speak to us. He can call us. And as a Christian, most importantly, God is with us. When God saved you, it wasn't just some intellectual thing. All right. He came in and he sealed you with himself, the holy spirit. And so if you're a Christian and you're like, why is God always calling me? Well, he's right there with you. All right. He's as close as he can be. So he's calling you and this is awesome. So this morning, do you feel alone? There's fear.

You're anxious. Maybe you're weary. Isn't it so good that God sees you. He calls you. He wants to be with you. He desires to connect to you. That's beautiful. That's God's grace. All right. So for this morning, I wanna cover three main points. Number one, God's call number two, our response and number three God's provision and promise. And so let's look at the first one. Let's look at God's call. Let's look at who he brings home. And this is chapter eight, starting in verse one. And if you guys can throw that next slide up here,

The slide of all the names, all right, these are the heads of their father's houses. This is the genealogy of those who went up with me. That's up with Ezra out of Babylon in the reign of Artaxerxes. This is the list. These are the people, these are the families. And I'm definitely not gonna try to read. 'em all okay. In your Bibles, you're gonna read that. Starting in chap--or verse one of chapter eight, all these families are listed and you're gonna see little numbers next to them. Okay? All these little numbers, some of them are like maybe eight, eight families. A part of that group were called and returned. Some of them it's maybe 115, all right, but there's about 1500 households. And if you extrapolate that out, we're talking up to 10,000 people, 20 thou--I mean, there's a lot of people here. There's faces there's names.

There's people, there's hearts there's lives in this list. And it's hard when we, when we read a genealogy in the Bible, right? It's really difficult. But just think of the humanity as here, exile from exile to life, from difficulty and brutal hardship to coming home. These are the people. Can you imagine reading this list years after and looking at those names and saying, you know what? I'm alive. My family is alive because that's my family or my family descended from some of those people. Can you imagine that it's powerful. It's profound. Now this list also reveals the true hearts of the people and the true hearts of God. Now some of these families, you would know them as the ones that were, oh yeah, we're in exile. We're gonna be the first to respond. We're gonna be the first to be obedient to God. We're gonna be the first to do what God asks.

We've kept ourselves. Holy we've done everything that we've needed, but you know what? Some of those families aren't here, some of those families are the ones have the smallest representation. Isn't that crazy to think of. And also there's families that you would look at and say, you know what? This family was so far away from God. They disrespected. And they were disgrace to their people. They wanted nothing to do with God or his ways. But you know, it's awesome. If you look in your Bible, those are some of those families that are in the triple digits. They've got 110, 118 families that responded. And those are the ones who came home. So what does this, what does this show us? It's so important shows us that God sees and calls everyone. God, one God sees and calls everyone. Even if they're the underdog. Even if they're the ones that are looked at as unlikely, unworthy, God calls them.

That's God's grace. We see that in the list. So on behalf of God, Ezra called all. And when the time came, everyone had a fair chance. And I know that some of you know, this firsthand, some

of you know, and have experienced, you've ran from God. You wanted nothing to do with God. You spit in God's face, but now you're here and now you're serving. And some of those are your pastors. And some of those are your--are your leaders. That's what God does. Have you felt the peace and security of being accepted and loved where someone really sees you and understands someone who's given you a fair shot and pulled you in to a warm embrace. That's what we see here in that list, that God calls the underdogs, the lonely and the hurt. Now, if you can flash that up there again, please.

Um, real important to know that there's a family name. That's not listed here. This is critical. All right, this family is the Levites. Now I don't have time to get into all the details, but you have to know that the Levites and the responsibility that God gave them is critical. It's a critical theme in the Bible. Alright. The Levites should have been the ones at the front of the line to go home because the goal of returning to Jerusalem, wasn't just to get people from point A to point B. It wasn't just to get people from discomfort and pain to comfort in life. The goal of re--of returning to Jerusalem was to remain faithful to this temple sacrifices. And it was only the Levites that could do that. Coming home again was not about the people, but about God's glory displayed through the temple and the Levites were needed.

They were necessary to do that. And so in verse 15, we see Ezra here. He says, I gathered them to the river that runs to Ahava. That was like kind of the staging ground. So he gathered, um, the people there and there, we camped for three days. And as I reviewed the people and the priests, I found there, none of the sons of Levi, can you imagine, 70 years of exile? And the only thing that kept you going was, you know what, one of the days, one day we're gonna get outta here. The Levites are gonna be with us. We're gonna be able to perform all the worship and the ceremonies in the temple. And what does Ezra do? He looks around, none of the Levites are there. It's not like they didn't realize that up to 20,000 people were just packing up and leaving. Right? What's crazy is that the Levites actually put their head in the sand, hid completely tapped out of their responsibility. And it's really kind of comical. If you, you know, if you think about it, right? The very people that needed to be there ran, what does this show us that often the most religious people require the most work.

Often the most religious people resist God's call when God calls us, we hide, we run Ezra called the Levites to return and perform their long awaited responsibility, but they hid and they ran, but that didn't stop God's grace to pursue and embrace and to find, and to never give up, even on the most religious. And if like me, if you're that religious person, God is after you, doesn't give up on you. That's what we see from that list of names. And that genealogy are you beat down and exhausted as a follower of Christ, discouraged, weary opportunities have come up and you've ran. God's. Grace is still for you. Doesn't give up. He goes back in and pulls you out. Praise God for that.

So that's the call. We've got the unlikely, the underdogs and were even able to see the Levites come in. So that's the call. Let's look at the response. Two points of the response that are very important. Number one is fasting and prayer. And number two is preparing the sacrifice cuz they haven't even stepped foot. They haven't even taken that first step yet. Now, if you're like me, God calls me. I see an opportunity. And typically what I do is I move all right, what do I need to do? God gimme the information. Let me lay it out. What are the risks? Let's do this thing. All right. Before any movement, God calls to prayer, uh, prayer and fasting and preparing the sacrifice. So in verse 21, then I proclaimed a fast there at the river, Ahava that we might humble ourselves

before God to seek from him a safe journey for ourselves, our children and all of our goods. Ezra says, I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us. Cuz we had told him that the hand of our God is for good on all who seek him. And his power for--of his wrath is against all who foresake him. And so we implored our God. We prayed and we--and he listened to our entreaty. He listened to our prayer.

Prayer is asking and listening to God. Prayer is coming in a situation like Ezra says here that they humble themselves. Prayer is coming to a situation where you're like, Lord, I don't have what it takes. Lord. I'm empty Lord. I want to take everything into my own hands right now, Lord, I want my desire. But Lord, I submit that to you. I come before you humbly because only you it's not these the king and the band of soldiers. It's not the other things in my life, but Lord only you are my salvation. That's a prayer. Fasting is setting aside things that distract us and I could spend, we could spend 20 minutes talking about all the things in our lives, in our busy society, our lives that distract us. And we have some great resources on the Doxs app. Um, they are spiritual discipline or spiritual formation guides on prayer and fasting.

I encourage you guys to check those out. Maybe go individually or with a couple people or maybe your Missional Community fasting may mean, Hey, I'm gonna give up a couple meals. And instead of that time period, I'm gonna seek the Lord because we have every opportunity to eat as much as we can anytime we want. And so setting aside a meal is a very typical aspect of, of fasting. And I guarantee if you, if you spend that time in prayer and if you pray and ask the Lord and if you talk to others about, Hey, what would that look like for fasting? God's gonna reveal himself. God's gonna re reveal himself.

So that's fasting in prayer. And again, before taking the next step at all, Ezra recalls his people to prepare the sacrifice. And this is something that is a little bit hard to wrap our, our, our minds around, but preparing the sacrifice. It is the hard work of being a Christian verse 24. He says, this is Ezra, 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 counselors and his Lords and all Israel had offered. He lays out everything of value. Now we don't have gold or silver or physical treasures like these at least I don't. Okay. So what does that mean for us? What do we do? What this means for us is that we, we must be obedient to bring to God what is valuable.

We must be obedient to do what he asks. And luckily we see the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. He says that offer our lives. We offer ourselves as a living sacrifice. We don't have gold and silver, but because Christ died for us and gave us new life, he sees that our life is, is the most valuable thing. And so we would present that to him. So preparing the sacrifice for us means we get up in the morning. We say, Lord, my mind, my desires, my heart, my intentions, my resources, my money, everything, my family, I wanna bring to you. And that's just not like this academic process. It's a supernatural event that we can come and bring ourselves to God that we are the sacrifice. And the next we see that Ezra pronounced, the sacrifice is ready and holy verses 28. And I said to them, you are holy to the Lord.

He's talking to the people and the vessels are holy and the silver and the gold are a free will offering to the Lord, the God of your fathers, guard them and keep them until you weigh them before the chief priest and the Levites and the heads of their father's houses in Israel, at Jerusalem, within the chambers of the house of the Lord Ezra and the people could have given up on preparing the gold and the silver they could have given up on their obedience, the gold and

the silver and those treasures meant danger. Can you imagine carrying that stuff? How much it weighed the risk that that was, it was heavy. They could have used that for other resources.

What is the sacrifice? God is asking you to prepare your time is valuable. You can serve your money is valuable. You can steward it. Well, decisions, decisions are making forgiveness that maybe can be extended to others. What is that sacrifice? That's the life of the Christian. And so I, I just encourage you to, to pray and discuss with your community about what that looks like. Don't go at it alone. All right. Finally, let's look at God's provision and promise the truly the coming home. Now remember for the Israelites here, this is a profound event. I'm gonna keep saying it. 70 years of pure hell, 70 years of anguish. And they're finally coming home. Verse 31. Then we departed from the river, Ahava on the 12th day of the first month to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was upon us. And he had delivered us from the--from the hand of our enemy and from ambushes along the way we came to Jerusalem. Just those words right there. We came to Jerusalem. Can you imagine your whole lineage looking forward to those words, we came to Jerusalem and there we remained for three days. And on the fourth day within the house of our God, the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed and given into the hands of the priest,

In that the promise was fulfilled. The promise was fulfilled of God's witness and salvation for all people in the temple in Jerusalem, the exile would not break. God's promise the victory in the return after 70 years is that the temple, once again was the place for sacrifice and a picture to the rest of the world that God's unconditional love his salvation, his fixing and mending and creating whole, all that was broken in humanity. Ultimately a picture of Christ was still happening and was still available. This was a celebration. This was a celebration, ultimately, because God has lifted up in his glory, right? He was lifted up. He was true and faithful. So in closing here, when God is calling you, what is your response? When there's fear and opposition, you can respond right now, a few points. I wanna encourage you with be encouraged that God calls the underdog. If you feel unworthy, Hey Josh, there's a list somewhere. That's where, that's where God works. He works with people under certain situations. Maybe I don't think I'm I'm. I don't think I'm there. It's not true. He works with everyone when faced with fear and oppositions. Start with fasting and prayer

In church, be empowered, take courage. As you prepare the sacrifice. When you look at your lives and say, Lord, everything that I have, it's gonna be tough. That's why it's called a sacrifice. Okay. And let let's walk in obedience. Let's encourage each other in community. Ultimately let's praise God for, he remains faithful to his promises. Amen. Amen. Let's pray, father. Thank you. That your truth is real

That as we read about Ezra and these people, this isn't just a story somewhere. These are real lives. This is your real power. Um, Lord, I thank you that you're, you're reaching the unlikely, the underdogs Lord. I just thank you that just talking to a brother 40 minutes ago, that you're after that most unlikely, that are probably gonna be the most used amazing people. So thank you that you call us. Lord, Lord, would you just work in our lives, Lord, I just, uh, thank you so much for each and every person. I thank you for the Doxa kids ministry right now. That's been going on Lord that our kids can be just blessed. If they can come to know you and be saved by you Lord, and just walk with you, God again, just thank you for all the servants Lord. And, and just for your word in Ezra, we thank you. Jesus. Amen. Amen.