

Another Exodus (Ezra 8:1-36)

01-June-25

Ezra 8:1-36

List of the Family Heads Returning With Ezra

8 These are the family heads and those registered with them who came up with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes:

² of the descendants of Phinehas, Gershom;

of the descendants of Ithamar, Daniel;

of the descendants of David, Hat-tush ³ of the descendants of Sheka-niah;

of the descendants of Parosh, Zechariah, and with him were registered 150 men;

⁴ of the descendants of Pa-hath-Moab, Elie-hoe-nai son of Zerah-iah, and with him 200 men;

⁵ of the descendants of Zattu, Shekaniah son of Ja-haziel, and with him 300 men;

⁶ of the descendants of Adin, Ebed son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men;

⁷ of the descendants of Elam, Jesha-iah son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men;

⁸ of the descendants of Shep-hat-iah, Zeb-adiah son of Michael, and with him 80 men;

⁹ of the descendants of Joab, Obadiah son of Je-hiel, and with him 218 men;

¹⁰ of the descendants of Bani, Shelo-mith son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men;

¹¹ of the descendants of Bebai, Zechariah son of Bebai, and with him 28 men;

¹² of the descendants of Azgad, Jo-hanan son of Hakk-atan, and with him 110 men;

¹³ of the descendants of Ado-ni-kam, the last ones, whose names were Eli-phel-et, Jeu-el and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men;

¹⁴ of the descendants of Bigvai, Uthai and Zakkur, and with them 70 men.

The Return to Jerusalem

¹⁵ I assembled them at the canal that flows toward Ahava, and we camped there three days. When I checked among the people and the priests, I found no Levites there. ¹⁶ So I summoned Eli-ezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah and Mesh-ullam, who were leaders, and Joi-arib and Elnathan, who were men of learning, ¹⁷ and I ordered them to go to Iddo, the leader in Kasiphia. I told them what to say to Iddo and his fellow Levites, the temple servants in Kas-iphia, so that they might bring attendants to us for the house of our God. ¹⁸ Because the gracious hand of our God was on us, they brought us Sherebiah, a capable man, from the descendants of Mahli son of Levi, the son of Israel, and Sherebiah's sons and brothers, 18 in all; ¹⁹ and Hash-abiah, together with Jeshaiiah from the descendants of Me-rari, and his brothers and nephews, 20 in all. ²⁰ They also brought 220 of the temple servants—a body that David and the officials had established to assist the Levites. All were registered by name. ²¹ There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. ²² I was ashamed to ask the king for soldiers and horsemen to protect us from enemies on the road, because we had told the king, "The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him, but his great anger is against all who forsake him." ²³ So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer. ²⁴ Then I set apart twelve of the leading priests, namely, Sherebiah, Hash-abiah and ten of their brothers, ²⁵ and I weighed out to them the offering of silver and gold

and the articles that the king, his advisers, his officials and all Israel present there had donated for the house of our God. ²⁶ I weighed out to them 650 talents of silver, silver articles weighing 100 talents, 100 talents of gold, ²⁷ 20 bowls of gold valued at 1,000 darics, and two fine articles of polished bronze, as precious as gold.

²⁸ I said to them, "You as well as these articles are consecrated to the Lord. The silver and gold are a freewill offering to the Lord, the God of your ancestors. ²⁹ Guard them carefully until you weigh them out in the chambers of the house of the Lord in Jerusalem before the leading priests and the Levites and the family heads of Israel." ³⁰ Then the priests and Levites received the silver and gold and sacred articles that had been weighed out to be taken to the house of our God in Jerusalem.

³¹ On the twelfth day of the first month we set out from the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem. The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way. ³² So we arrived in Jerusalem, where we rested three days.

³³ On the fourth day, in the house of our God, we weighed out the silver and gold and the sacred articles into the hands of Me-re-moth son of Uriah, the priest. Eleazar son of Phinehas was with him, and so were the Levites Joz-abad son of Jeshua and Noa-diah son of Bin-nui. ³⁴ Everything was accounted for by number and weight, and the entire weight was recorded at that time.

³⁵ Then the exiles who had returned from captivity sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven male lambs and, as a sin offering, twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to

the Lord. ³⁶ They also delivered the king's orders to the royal satraps and to the governors of Trans-Eu-phrates, who then gave assistance to the people and to the house of God.

Please have your **Bibles opened** to **Ezra chapter 8**

There's an **outline** for you to take **notes**. Let me **pray** first. Let's pray...

Intro/Context/Exodus

This morning the sermon title is **The Second Exodus**

So - we'd better **define** what Exodus means

[Slide-Exodus]

The word "**Exodus**" comes from the **Greek** word Ex-odos (ἐξοδος), which is two words combined:

The word - "**Ex**" – meaning "**out of**"

And the word - "**odos**" – meaning "**way**" or "**road**"

So literally, Exodus means "***the way out***" or "***departure***"

In our **everyday language** – we've **adopted** the word **exodus** – to mean "***a mass departure of people***" [[example – a massive crowd leaving a stadium all at once](#)]

In the Bible – It’s **GOD** who - provides and enables the way out

We see this clearly - in the second book of the Bible – **The Book of Exodus**

- Where God’s people, the Israelites, were **slaves in Egypt**.

God raised up **Moses** to lead them out.

After Pharaoh refused to let them go, God sent **10 plagues** – to “persuade” Pharaoh.

- Finally, Pharaoh let God’s people leave Egypt.
- The Israelites left Egypt, but Pharaoh changed his mind and pursued them.
- God **enabled Moses to part the Red Sea**, and the Israelites crossed safely.
- The waters then **closed over the Egyptian army**, and God's people were **free** – and eventually they came to the Promised Land – Israel
- After centuries in the Promised Land – two tribes of Israel – Judah and Benjamin were sent off into exile to Babylon – because of their continual disobedience and rebellion against God

Now as we hit Ezra chapter 8 – we have a “**Second Exodus**” – not from **Egypt** this time – but from **Babylon**

And God raises up **another spiritual leader** – like **Moses** – called **Ezra** – who is a **priest**.

And just like God was with the Ancient Israelites in their journey from Egypt and through the wilderness – God is with Ezra and the Israelites in their journey as well

And **WE** are on a **journey** in our lives – sometimes there's **multiple journeys** as **seasons and circumstances change in our lives** – we'll come back to that later

But first – I'd like us to see what **we can learn** from this **Second Exodus**

1st thing we can learn is – **God gathers People for His Purposes**

[Slide-God gathers]

God Gathers People for His Purposes (Ezra 8:1–20)

In verses 1 to 14 – we have this list of tongue-twisting names – the heads of each family that returned with Ezra – and their numbers

This doesn't include women and children – so it's probably a few thousand people.

Why does **God record these names and numbers?**

A few reasons:

- To show **God's faithfulness** in **preserving a remnant** of Israel during the exile, so that they can return from exile. This means **God keeps His covenant** with His people
- It shows that the people who returned are **legitimately descendants** of Israel's tribes – **especially the priests**
- It shows God – is a **God of order** – and that **He ordained this return**
- It shows that **God honours the people who returned**. They didn't have to return with Ezra – they chose to – so **God honours them by mentioning them by name**

Then in **verse 15** – Ezra hits a **problem**

The **people** with him are **ordinary people** plus some **priests** (**who are direct descendants from Aaron – the first High Priest**) but **there are no Levites**.

Back at the time of the first Exodus – **God had set apart the Levites from the tribe of Levi – to serve as assistants to the priests in the Temple**. Their **duties were: guarding the Temple; preparing offerings; singing, playing music, leading worship** (1 Chronicles 15); **helping to teach the Law** (2 Chronicles 17:7-9); **caring for the physical needs of the Temple** (cleaning, maintenance and transporting holy items for the temple)

Ezra realizes that if he is to return to Jerusalem and reestablish proper worship of God in the temple and offer sacrifices and burnt offerings – **he can't do that without the Levites!**

This **mini-crises is averted** – when **God's gracious hand provides**
 18 men from Sherebiah's group (verse 18)
 20 men from Hashabiah's group (verse 19)
 And 220 temple servants – all Levites (verse 20)

Application

Applying that to us

God still gathers His people for His purposes today

Every role in Jesus' Church **matters**

In the last 12 years – in the time I've been here at Toukley

Many people have **passed away or relocated**

About 75% of our church family have joined us in the last 12 years – only 25% of our church family are the original people

The elders we have now – are not the same elders when I first came here.

The Committee of Management team we have now is a completely different make-up than when I first came

My point is God's gracious hand raises up people for His purposes!

God raises up - spiritual leaders - like the Minister and Elders

COM members, Bible teachers, Bible study leaders, people to teach children, Bible readers, evangelists, Bible deliverers, welcomers, people to pray, mercy people, pastoral carers, hospitality people and worshippers.

Just like in Ezra's day – all these people are needed to restore proper worship.

Jesus established His Church (Matthew 16:18) as the way to worship and as the way to tell other people about Jesus.

We can't do church on our own as individuals – that's not the way Jesus' church works!

Reflection Question: Are we living as part of God's gathered people or are we going it alone?

(pause)

The 2nd thing we can learn from this Second Exodus of Ezra's is – God's Gracious Hand is upon those who trust in Him – that's in verses 21 to 23 – and verses 31 to

32

[God's Hand]

God's Gracious Hand is upon those who Trust in Him (Ezra 8:21–23, 31-32)

If we look at verse 21 – Ezra wisely calls for a time of **prayer and fasting** – and for the **people to humble themselves before God** - so that they can **ask God for a safe journey** for the Israelites as they travel this 900-mile (1400km) journey from Babylon to Jerusalem!

You see Ezra – in verse 22 – **had refused a military escort from the King** – because he had told the King “*the gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to Him, but His anger is against all who forsake Him*”.

Ezra trusted that God's hand would be with the Israelites in their journey.

But Ezra also realized that - **the way that God's people bring about God's will to be done** – **is by prayer**! (Matthew 6:10; 1 John 5:14-15; James 5:16-18; Romans 8:26-27)

And that's what Ezra and the Israelites did – verse 23 – **they prayed and God answered**!

We see this answered prayer confirmed:

In verse 31 - *The hand of our God was on us, and he protected us from enemies and bandits along the way*

and verse 32 - they *arrived in Jerusalem, where they rested three days*.

Application

There's two things we can get from Ezra's prayer

1st – In our journey through life – **there are many times that we can experience the gracious hand of God's protection upon us.**

Personally:

- God sent a man (unknown) to save me from drowning in an outdoor public swimming pool in London when I was 3
- God sent a kind Christian lady to tell me about Jesus – when I was 33
- God sent a brilliant surgeon to save me from cancer – when I was 46
- And that same surgeon to save me again from cancer – when I was 49

Reflection Question: Perhaps – you could reflect on how God’s gracious hand has been on you – at morning tea – and share with people at your table!

Praise God for His gracious hand upon us!

(pause)

The 2nd thing we can get from Ezra’s prayer

Is a bit of **a light globe moment for me** this week

Notice Ezra called for **prayer** and **FASTING** (v21, v23)

Let’s be clear **what fasting isn’t:**

- It’s not about **punishing ourselves to earn God’s favour**
- It’s not **a public show of our spirituality** (see Matthew 6:16-18) – look at me!
Look at me!
- It’s not just **about skipping meals – it must be accompanied with prayer and seeking God**
- And it’s not a **spiritual-diet** or **self-help exercise**

Fasting is:

- **Voluntarily giving up food** (or something else) **for a spiritual purpose**—to draw closer to God – to seek God earnestly and sincerely
- It's a **way to humble ourselves before God** (Ezra 8:21).
- And **fasting is done alongside prayer, repentance, and discernment.**
- And fasting expresses a **complete dependence on God and a heartfelt expression that we really need His help** (e.g., Ezra, Jesus, early church).

From this **I was convicted to think about...**

How serious **is my prayer life?**

How heartfelt **are my prayers?**

Now I don't **know what your "journey" is right now**

But here's **some examples**

Your journey might be - **the next season of your life** (retirement, moving house or changing jobs)

Your journey might be - **battling a serious illness**

Your journey might be – **overcoming the loss of a loved one or the loss of circumstances**

Your journey might be – **a family crisis or relationship crisis**

Your journey might be – **battling a severe trial** [that perhaps no-one even knows about]

Whatever your journey – **Ezra is telling us – to really really really commit to prayer and fasting**

I'm convicted that – with some of the people and situations I'm praying for – **I need to be fasting when I pray – and really devote my complete attention to asking God to help**

How long should we fast?

There's no direct formula – Part of a day (Judges 20:26); One day (Leviticus 16:29); Three days (Esther 4:16); Seven days (1 Samuel 31:13); Forty days (Jesus – Matthew 4:2; Moses – Exodus 34:28)

For me: **I've decided to commit Thursdays as a day of prayer and fasting** – and skip breakfast and lunch – and devote that time to prayer. And also to stop every hour for 10 minutes and pray. **Perhaps you could also commit to something like that?**

Let's be honest – notwithstanding what's going on in the world at the moment – there are many many situations we can commit to the Lord in prayer and fasting (pause)

Also this morning we remember the 25th anniversary of this church building – and there has been continuous worship here at Toukley – since 1st August 1953 – that's almost 72 years

And 2 weeks ago – we launched the “I love my Church” appeal – with the view of future proofing and restoring Jesus' Church for worship here at Toukley for the next 50 years or more...

Our desire is for the worship of God and His Son Jesus to continue – way beyond our lifetimes.

And it seems to me – Ezra is saying – **we need to commit this desire to God with - prayer and fasting.**

So **I'm challenging you to join me on Thursdays in prayer and fasting for Jesus'**

Church in Toukley

And I'm also challenging you to not only pray and fast for the "I love my Church" appeal – but **to pray and fast that God would move hearts to read the Bibles we are delivering door to door and that people would come to follow Jesus** – and I'm also **challenging you to be praying and fasting for those people and situations which you think are really difficult and require a miracle** – because remember - **God is in the miracle business!**

[Slide-God Entrusts]

God Entrusts His People with Holy Things (Ezra 8:24–36)

The 3rd thing we can learn from this Second Exodus of Ezra's is – **God's Entrusts His People with Holy Things** – that's in verses 24 to 36

In these verses Ezra carefully weighs out silver, gold, bronze and sacred holy items for God's temple in Jerusalem – and **entrusts them to faithful men.**

The items – verse 28 – **are consecrated – set apart holy to the Lord** – and so too **are the men carrying them.**

The **journey is dangerous** – verse 31 – but **the gracious hand of the Lord protects them from any enemies or bandits**

On arrival in Jerusalem – **everything is counted out** – and **cross checked** – **all is accounted for** – **by weight and number** – verse 34

On top of that – in verse 35 – **worship is restored at the temple** – when the people (exiles) sacrificed burnt offerings to the Lord God of Israel.

These offerings **were for their sin** and also **to give thanks to the Lord for His protection and provision.**

We have to realise that the whole point of Ezra's return with the Israelites – **was to restore proper worship of the Lord.**

God Entrusted His People with these Holy Things - and His people proved to be **good stewards** of God's Holy things!

Application

For us

What “**holy things**” has God entrusted to us?

We haven't just been entrusted with physical things: like **our loved ones, family, church family** and **possessions** – God has also **entrusted to us** spiritual responsibilities:

- The **Gospel of Jesus** – to learn, live and teach - “*Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you...*” (2 Timothy 1:14; see also 1 Corinthians 4:1-2)
- The spiritual gifts God has given us – as 1 Peter 4:10 says - *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*
- Time, money and resources – Jesus says “*Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much*” (Luke 16:10)

- Our **bodies** and **maintaining good health** – remember our bodies are **temples of the Holy Spirit** (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) – and we are meant to honour **God with our bodies**
- And God also entrusts us **to be a Christ-like example for people to follow** (1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 5:1-2)

Reflection Question: **Are we being faithful stewards of what has God entrusted to us?**

Conclusion: Our Exodus Journey (John 10:27-28)

To finish up then...

Like Ezra and the exiles, **we too have an Exodus Journey:**

- We are on a journey - **from sin to salvation** – through **Jesus' death and resurrection**
- We are on a journey - **from this dark world to our Promised Land - God's kingdom in Heaven**
- We are on a journey - **from wandering around lost from God – to proper worship of God**

Ezra was a great and faithful leader

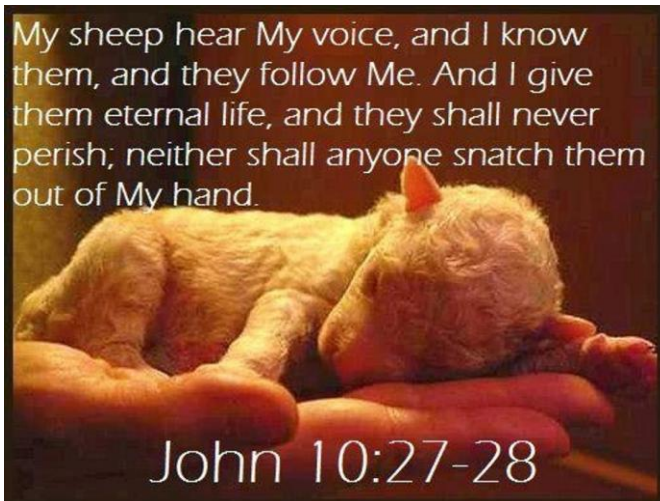
However - **Jesus is our greater leader**—He is our true Exodus – **He is our true way out of sin** —Jesus brings us out of captivity and exile in sin - and leads us home to eternal life in Heaven (Luke 9:31, Hebrews 11:8–10)

Jesus is the Good Shepherd – and **we are His sheep**

Jesus came to find lost sheep – like us – and He makes this wonderful promise in

John 10:27-28:

[Slide-John 10:27-28]



My sheep listen to my voice; and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand.

As we continue our Exodus Journey – Ezra chapter 8 is telling us

The gracious hand of our God is on everyone who looks to him (v22)

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father,

thank you that you gather people for your purposes;

thank you that your gracious hand is on those who trust in you;

thank you that you entrust your people with holy things.

Help us to learn from Ezra to faithfully trust you in all things and to humble ourselves in prayer and fasting for your will to be done on Earth as it is done in Heaven. In Jesus' Name, we pray. Amen.