

Exploring Ezra

9. Ezra 8: The Priesthood Arrives *Faith and Initiative*

Aim: To consider how Ezra left his own safety in God's hands, how we can trust God's promises and where the lines between faith and taking personal action lie.

To Start With:

Have you ever been in a life-threatening experience? What happened?

Or

What dangers do we generally face in life? And how would you say we tend to approach them?

Setting the Scene:

From last week's study ask someone to summarise who Ezra was and what he'd been commissioned to do. (Look back at Ezra 7 if necessary)

Engaging with the Text:

We will explore this fairly unfamiliar story one section at a time.

1. Read *Ezra 8.1-14* and as you go total up the number of men (i.e. potential fighters) Ezra recruited to return with him. What strikes you?
2. Read *8.15-20* - Who is missing? Why are they needed? How are they found?
3. Read *8.21-23*
 - a) What dangers do you imagine Ezra and his party face?
 - b) How confident does Ezra seem that God will protect them? To what extent would you say he is putting the group at risk by not accepting the king's protection? Is this faith or foolishness?
4. Read *8.24-30* - Why do you think Ezra does this with the temple treasure before they depart?

5. Finally read *8.31-6* - How would you summarise the journey and events on arrival?
6. As you consider the events of this story to what extent does it seem to you that Ezra sorts out problems himself and to what extent does he leave it in God's hands? (What other examples of this attitude can you think of in the Bible?)
7. Some people try to control everything - creating safety nets in case God lets them down. Other people are quite passive - thinking God will sort it all out and they don't need to act at all.
 - Which do you tend to do? Why do you think that is?
 - Where is the balance of trusting God with being proactive ourselves?
 - What might we learn from how Ezra undertook this dangerous commission?
8. Reflecting back over the story of Ezra what are your main observations about God? How might that help us as we face the summer and the changes that many of us face in the coming months?

You might like to finish in smaller groups discussing the last question and praying for each other - to have faith and wisdom, especially since nearing the end of term a lot of people may have significant changes approaching soon.

