

Who is leading you into revival?

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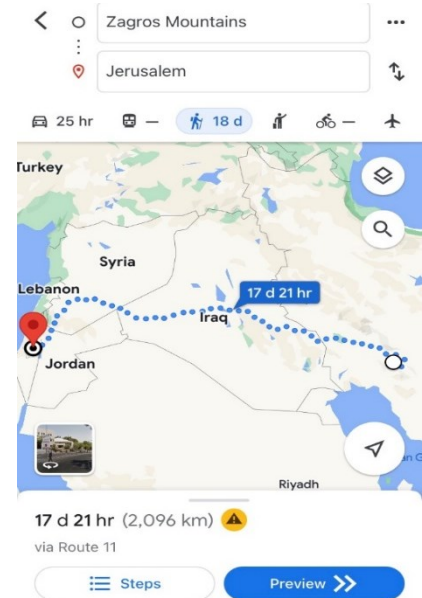
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A 4-month journey of faith

According to *Google Maps*, it takes about 18 days to walk the 2,096 KM journey from the *Zagros* mountains in Iran, to Jerusalem. This mountain is located near Susa the former capital of the Persian Empire.

If you were to drive, this journey takes only 25 hours but in around 460 BC, that is about 2,400 years agoⁱ, a faithful man of God called Ezra together with about 5,000 peopleⁱⁱ including their children, wives and elderly took this journey but it took much longer than the 18 days if he had been alone.

It took him about 4 months to make the same journey.ⁱⁱⁱ What is more astounding is that he was carrying on him about \$195m in the equivalent of gold and silver and bronze (see below). He and those with him made the journey without even one soldier to protect them from enemies this long and slow journey!^{iv}



Item	Bible measure	Kg	Price per KG (\$)	Total (\$)
Silver	24 tons	21,772	588	12,802,171
Silver articles	7,500 pounds	3,402	588	2,000,342
Gold	7500 pounds	3,402	52,893	179,938,971
Gold coins	20 gold bowls equal to 1,000 gold coins	9	52,893	454,880
Total				195,196,365

Source: *Ezra 8: 26 - 27 (NLT)*. Prices: *bullionvault.com*

What caused this leader Ezra to trust in his God so much? What was it about him that gave him this faith?

The bible says this about him:

For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel. Ezra 7: 10 (NIV).

Another version explains the unique thing about this Ezra leader:

Ezra had committed himself to studying the Revelation of God, to living it, and to teaching Israel to live its truths and ways. Ezra 7: 10 (MSG).

A man devoted to the simple act of reading the bible doesn't seem to amount to a great leader but somehow Ezra God noticed and that's why there is a book in the bible dedicated to him and more so, we can learn from him for he consistently and in a committed way – meaning with all his heart and with passion did three things with the bible:

1. Studying it. So, he knew it.
2. Living it. So, he obeyed it.
3. Teaching it to others. So, he preached it.

Many of us today by comparison don't give ourselves over to God's service and so we don't know the bible, we only partially obey it and hardly ever tell others about it. We therefore have something to learn from the Lord's servants past and so we are going to see how Ezra's life style of these 3 things he did spilled over into spiritual reformation or revival in ancient Israel.

Even beyond ourselves, do you have a Christian leader like this Ezra man?

If not, I then challenge you: "Who is leading you into revival?"

The right kind of leader can make or break and so we will study this little-known man Ezra to help us learn how the Lord wants us to "catch the revival" learning the lesson from Ezra.

We will also look at one of the greatest revivals in Africa and its little-known leaders and perhaps we shall see the parallels with the Priest Ezra.

About me and these series

In March 2017 my life was turned upside down, or is it, right-side up? I had spent 20 years of rebellion until I had a radical encounter with IAM when Jesus, IAM visited me and by his Spirit, I repented of my many sins. I got baptized soon thereafter. Then towards the end of 2021, the Lord commissioned me to prepare a series of 12 messages called "catch the revival" of which the full series of messages can be seen here: <https://www.shaweleroad.com/revival>

Ezra's life style #1 – he knew the word of God.

The first example of how Ezra was committed to God was that he knew the word of God but first a background to him.

As I narrated, Ezra and about 5,000 jews made a 4-month journey from Persia, likely Susa to Jerusalem with about \$195m worth of gold and silver. They were making this journey because God had sent the children of Israel to exile in Babylon for about 70 years. He sent them to exile for their rebellion and sin. Babylon had eventually been conquered by Persia but the Persian Kings looked favourably on the Jews and respected God so he gave them permission return to their land of Israel to rebuild the temple of God, so Ezra was one of the exiles returning to Israel, carrying with him gold and silver for the temple furnishing. The bible shows Ezra saying this about that time:

I proclaimed a fast there beside the Ahava Canal, a fast to humble ourselves before our God and pray for wise guidance for our journey—all our people and possessions. I was embarrassed to ask the king for a cavalry bodyguard to protect us from bandits on the road. We had just told the king, "Our God lovingly looks after all those who seek him, but turns away in disgust from those who leave him."

So we fasted and prayed about these concerns. And he listened. Ezra 8: 21-23 (MSG).

It's because Ezra and those with him fasted and turned to God for their trust that they arrived safely in Jerusalem 4 months later with no one attacking them.

What was it Ezra knew about the God of Moses his ancestor that had enabled him to trust the word of God?

Ezra in his regular reading of the bible must have known verses like this:

The Lord your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, and in the wilderness. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place." In spite of this, you did not trust in the Lord your God, who went ahead of you on your journey, in fire by night and in a cloud by day, to search out places for you to camp and to show you the way you should go. Deuteronomy 1: 30-33 (NIV).

Ezra and the people with him humbled themselves before God because they knew he was as tender as a father who carries a son who is tired. Even if they were going to march in the wilderness on the way to Jerusalem, like God had gone before his ancestor Moses on the exodus from Egypt, likewise he would be with Ezra on the Exodus from Persia. He would be the one to protect them – not soldiers. He would go ahead of them and find them safe places for them to camp.

Because Ezra knew his bible and had read it all the time, he had gotten the faith to believe it and therefore ask the King not to give them soldiers to protect them.

Who is leading you into revival? Does your leader know the word of God such that they can help you develop such confidence in God that they take him by his living oracles and believe his word – which is unchanging yesterday, today and forever?

Ezra's life style #2 – he obeyed the word of God.

The bible says:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1: 22 (NIV).

Many of us sadly are like this, we read the bible but we do not put all our weight, all our trust on it such that we do what we say. Those who do this are deceiving themselves. In fact this same book of James goes on to say this:

For anyone who hears the word but does not carry it out is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror, and after observing himself goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. James 1: 23-24 (NIV).

Do not be like an absurd person who forgets what they look like. Be like Ezra. He once burned so hot in faithfulness to God's word, he did something radical – he got priests to leave their foreign wives in obedience to God. The bible says this:

After all this was done, the leaders came to me and said, "The People of Israel, priests and Levites included, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring people around here with all their

vulgar obscenities—Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, Amorites. They have given some of their daughters in marriage to them and have taken some of their daughters for marriage to their sons. The holy seed is now all mixed in with these other peoples. And our leaders have led the way in this betrayal.”

When I heard all this, I ripped my clothes and my cape; I pulled hair from my head and out of my beard; I slumped to the ground, appalled. Ezra 9: 1-3 (MSG).

Ezra the priest knew that the Lord had commanded the Israelites not to mix with the neighbouring nations – because these nations worshipped other gods like Baal and Ishtar and Molech. When they disobeyed God, these intermarriages had led them to turn away from God to worship idols and that’s how they had ended up in exile in the first place. He was so shocked as summarized above. Later the bible then records him taking action as follows:

Ezra the priest stood up and spoke: “You’ve broken trust. You’ve married foreign wives. You’ve piled guilt on Israel. Now make your confession to God, the God of your ancestors, and do what he wants you to do: Separate yourselves from the people of the land and from your foreign wives.” The whole congregation responded with a shout, “Yes, we’ll do it—just the way you said it!” Ezra 10: 10-12 (MSG).

Ezra was faithful to obey the Lord and he took action, he convinced the exiles to obey God and they followed him. It took them 3 months to eventually do this, but they were successful because of the obedience of Ezra.

Ezra’s life style #3 – he preached the word of God.

Ezra was so zealous for God and wanting people to change that he once preached the word for 7 days straight, teaching people how to live it! The bible says this:

Ezra read from the Book of The Revelation of God each day, from the first to the last day—they celebrated the feast for seven days. On the eighth day they held a solemn assembly in accordance with the decree. Nehemiah 8: 18 (MSG).

It is not enough to read the word of God for yourself, one must understand what it means and be able to interpret it for God’s people – so they can not only understand, but that they may change their lives. About this period that Ezra the priest was reading the word to people the bible shows that it was not just reading. He was also explaining/clarifying, comforting the people and ultimately causing them to understand what they were reading:

- **Explanation/Understanding.** They read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage. Nehemiah 8: 8 (NLT).
- **Comfort.** Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were interpreting for the people said to them, “Don’t mourn or weep on such a day as this! For today is a sacred day before the LORD your God.” For the people had all been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. Nehemiah 8: 9 (NLT).
- **Causing people to obey.** On October 9[c] the family leaders of all the people, together with the priests and Levites, met with Ezra the scribe to go over the Law in greater detail. As they studied the Law, they discovered that the Lord had commanded through Moses that the Israelites should live in shelters during the festival to be held that month. He had said that a proclamation should be made throughout their towns and in Jerusalem, telling the people to

go to the hills to get branches from olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees. They were to use these branches to make shelters in which they would live during the festival, as prescribed in the Law. So the people went out and cut branches and used them to build shelters on the roofs of their houses, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of God's Temple, or in the squares just inside the Water Gate and the Ephraim Gate. So, everyone who had returned from captivity lived in these shelters during the festival, and they were all filled with great joy! The Israelites had not celebrated like this since the days of Joshua[f] son of Nun. Nehemiah 8: 13-17 (NLT).

For a revival to be successful, your leader should be able to open the word of God to you, to explain, to comfort you and to ultimately cause you to want to obey it once you understand it, this is how successful revivals break out, when the word of God ultimately is obeyed!

Who is leading you into revival? Are they doing this?

An example of a successful revival modelling the focus on the bible.

In these "catch the revival series" I have told you of famous and well-known revivals like the Azusa Street revival, which birthed modern day Pentecostalism and it's over 500m followers. I also told you of the 2nd Great Awakening and leaders like Charles Finney. I told you of the Great Evangelistic revival in London and the Moravian influence. I even told you of the great revival in the town of Ephesus by Paul as told in Acts 19.

However, there is a less well-known revival yet when it was studied by great revival scholars like Edwin Orr, it was noted: Many historians agree that the East African Revival or the *Balokole* revival had the **farthest-reaching and longest-lasting impact** of all the renewal movements in Africa in the 20th century.

Can you imagine? "Farthest reaching and longest lasting impact" and yet you have probably never heard of its leaders like: Joe Church, Simeon Nsibambi, William Nagenda, Yosiya Kinuka, and Festo Kivengere. The Lord chose to use these less well-known leaders who testified about the Holy Spirit's work and spread the renewal movement to Switzerland, France, and Germany in 1949; Malawi in 1951; Angola, and India in 1952; the United States and Israel in 1953; and Brazil in 1959. From its low-key beginnings in Rwanda and Uganda in the mid-1930s, the revival became an international movement whose impact was carried beyond Africa as far as Europe, North America, and South Asia. Kivengere became the best-known African evangelist of that time and joined the Billy Graham evangelistic team for several campaigns. ^v

What are some of the things about this revival and its leaders that we can learn on the importance of knowing, obeying and teaching God's word -just like Ezra had done?

1. **Leaving comfort of exile for a faraway land.** One of its leaders, Joe Church left the prestige of having studied medicine at Cambridge University to instead obey God's call and travel to Africa, to Rwanda as a missionary doctor. Like Ezra, he left the comforts of the home he had known, to travel to a far-off land he had never known. God safely took him to Africa at a time when journeys were perilous – for example from disease and wild life.
2. **Dissatisfaction with spiritual condition of the country.** Church travelled to Uganda to find rest from a period of spiritual dryness and encountered Simeon Nsibambi who like him was dissatisfied with the state of the Anglican Church in Uganda. The Church in Uganda had been established in 1877 but it was shallow. Many became Christians but still drunk waragi (banana liquor), still stole, were polygamous and practiced witchcraft even if they had been baptized.

They did this because in Uganda at the introduction of Christianity (1877 and onwards), people became Christians not because of a real commitment to Christ but because it was the profitable thing to do because Anglican baptism, followed by education in a church founded school became the accepted route to social and political advancement because at the time the Church had power. The Bishop of the Anglican Church ranked third after the Governor and the Kabaka (King of Buganda).^{vi} Like Ezra, the Ugandan leaders were unhappy with the spiritual condition of the people around them.

3. **Humility.** Church never claimed to be the leader of the revival, but rather considered himself as one of the co-workers under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. He practiced the team ministry approach, and firmly believed in the radical equality of all—black and white, men and women—as sinners saved by the grace of Christ. Ezra had a similar humble outlook in for example fasting.
4. **Grass roots preaching.** The most distinctive feature of the East African Revival is that it sprang from the grassroots level, through small group revival teams without a great revival preacher. Unlike the European or American Evangelical Revival tradition—which featured famous revival preachers such as Wesley, Whitefield, Charles Finney, and Moody—the East African Revival began primarily as a small group fellowship meeting of the revival team in homes and villages, in which all participants freely shared their testimony of “Spirit-filling” experience and desire for the higher Christian life. Like Ezra the priest who worked with the Levites to explain the bible to others, the East African revival used several evangelists. Like Ezra the priest preaching for 7 days to others that they may understand and obey the word with changed lives – leaving behind their sins and walking in holiness.
5. **Focus on Christ as per the bible.** The distinctive theology and practice of the East African Revival was its emphasis on the real experience of the saving power of Christ and daily submission to him rather than an emphasis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues and supernatural healing. For any revival to be successful, it has to be Christ at the centre. Ezra the priest must have learned that God the IAM should be who we love with all our heart and our soul and our strength. The *Balokole* like Ezra, were devoted to follow the teachings of the bible because it showed that the Spirit would glorify Christ. This can also be seen in the terms that the revivalists typically used: “born again,” “cleansed in the blood of Jesus,” and “walking in the light together.” The most famous, triumphant revival hymn—*Tukutendereza Yesu* (“We Praise You Jesus”)

Conclusion

A leader who leads you into revival but is not being led by Jesus will lead you into disaster. Zealous as Ezra was, the people eventually rebelled again and more than 400 years later they even killed the messiah who zealous Ezra likely pre figured. Unless the Lord Jesus changes you and your leaders from the inside out, external revival without the internal change of the Holy Spirit can only be short lived.

Has the Lord Jesus visited you and given you his Spirit who alone can change your heart to bring about a revival that lasts for eternity?

If not, I ask you, “Who is leading you into revival?” Is it a man or is it Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? If you put your trust in the arm of flesh like a charismatic leader, then you will fail, but if you put your ultimate trust in God, the word he places in your heart will become like a seed and it will bear fruit into eternal life, like he did for me when he revived me. This Jesus, the true leader of all revivals as the East African revival focussed on is what will enable you have an enduring legacy, an enduring revival.

As for this Lord Jesus, who is he and what does he want me to tell you?

The message Jesus wants me to pass on to you

God shows no favouritism and from every nation – even those who are formerly pagan and rebellious, he accepts those who fear him and turn to do what is right. For those who are seeking God's friendship, he has appointed this Jesus, who came to this earth as a man and he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by Satan. He was messiah who leaders like Ezra had read all about, the IAM who had appeared to Moses and their ancestor Abraham.

Jesus was however rejected by his people the Jews and handed over by them to be killed, but he rose again from the dead after 3 days, just as many prophets had prophesied for thousands of years before his birth.

He is now seated at the right hand of the Lord almighty and it is he who God, the Ancient of Days has appointed as righteous judge over the living and the dead, the one with the power to forgive all our sins. Everyone who believes this message as he has commanded me to preach and accepts this Jesus as Lord and asks for forgiveness, they will receive this forgiveness and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who God promised all those who believe in Jesus his son.^{vii}

Do you believe this? Do you want God's forgiveness, to be at peace with God?

If so, pray with me:

"God of heaven, I confess that I am a sinner and have been one since birth, but I have heard that you can make me new, and you sent your son Jesus to die for me. He rose again and it is he who can give me his Holy Spirit. Please forgive me and welcome me into your Kingdom, teach me how to follow you. In Jesus' name, Amen"

Notes

ⁱ <https://www.pottypadre.com/ruins-to-restoration/timeline-of-ezra-nehemiah-1/>

ⁱⁱ

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Return_to_Zion#:~:text=The%20third%20aliyah%20was%20led,in%20this%20wave%20of%20returnees.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Ezra 7: 8-9

^{iv} See Ezra 8: 21-23

^v <https://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/c-d/church-john-edward-1899-1989/>

^{vi} Sourced from *The Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* by Rev. James Ndyabahika.

^{vii} Parts of this message come from Peter preaching to Cornelius and his family as told in Acts 10: 34-43