

Our God is an awesome God. Awesome as in someone who inspires awe, wonder. My family experienced that over the past fortnight. Not just in the unlikely recovery of my Dad. From a bleed on the brain regarded as terminal. In the timing of Dad's illness. While his youngest daughter, a nurse, was in Lismore on holidays. Not long after he spent time with all his grandchildren and great grandchildren. So many circumstances and so-called coincidences showing our awesome God at work. Our awesome God also revealed in an Old Testament passage. At first glance a boring list of unpronounceable names best avoided. When read and explored in its context another story of our awesome God. Moving hearts for the rebuilding of his people and the fulfilment of his promises. Ever since the disastrous introduction of sin into the world, that is what our awesome God is doing. Sisters and brothers, take hold of this biblical insight today. Our God is the restoring, rebuilding, renewing God. The God who always delivers on his promises. As we explore together the book of Ezra and Nehemiah, the first two chapters of Ezra set the scene. Last week we heard of God's awesome intervention in the course of history. Moving the heart of a pagan King. To permit the people of God, exiled from their home, to return to Jerusalem. To restore their life with God living amongst them. By rebuilding the temple. Moving the heart of a pagan King to ensure the material provision they needed to do so. Moving the hearts of appropriate people to embrace the risky adventure of returning and rebuilding God's people. Today's reading: the list of those people. Named personally, by tribe, by location. What an awesome God. Brothers and sisters, how are your hearts being captured by this awesome God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? I pray you will rejoice in this awesome God as we explore the truths revealed in this long list of names. **First**, God acts to ensure the fulfilment of his promises. Evident in the leadership team moved by God to return to Jerusalem. *'in company with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum and Baanah.'* **v2** A hint of the 12 apostles here. Despite only eleven names in the list. In the corresponding list in the Book of Nehemiah another name is added to give a list of twelve. From the list above, two key figures. Zerubbabel, a descendent of David, ancestor of Jesus. Named in Jesus' family tree in **Matthew 1**. His return to Jerusalem keeps alive God's promise a descendent of David will be the Messiah. From the list, Joshua, the chief priest, a descendent of Aaron, who along with his sons, set

apart by God to serve as the priestly family. Joshua's return to Jerusalem restores, rebuilds the pattern of worship set out in the Mosaic law. Jesus, an alternative form of the name Joshua. A hint here of the one who is the priest of the new covenant. Not established by the blood of goats and bulls but by his own shed blood. What an awesome God. Sisters and brothers, God keeps his promises. Never let go of that. God is faithful even when we are unfaithful to him. **Second**, God chooses the right people to achieve his purposes. God moves the hearts of thousands of his people to return to Jerusalem. Exactly the right mix of people for restoring and rebuilding. The names of **ch2** consist of ordinary citizens, priests, Levites, temple servants. In the mix, a measure of God's grace. A group who could not prove their eligibility. **v59-63** allowed to tag along and enjoy the restoration God provides. A foretaste of Jesus' invitation to the outsider to share in the salvation he offers. What an awesome God. Brothers and sisters, God didn't make a mistake when he chose you. God didn't get it wrong when he placed you in this fellowship of believers. You are part of the restoring and rebuilding of God's people flowing from this church. **Third**, God provides for the rebuilding of his people. Rebuilding after the exile began with the temple. In this instance God's provision is extraordinary. Human and material provision. *'The whole company numbered 42,360, besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 200 male and female singers. They had 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys.... According to their ability they gave to the treasury for this work 61,000 darics of gold, 5,000 minas of silver and 100 priestly garments.'* **v64-67,69** The heads of families gave five hundred kilograms of gold and nearly three metric tons of silver. Only a portion of the wealth God provided for the resettlement of his people in Judah. What an awesome God. Sisters and brothers, God continues to provide for his restoring, rebuilding, renewing work. We know the generosity of our awesome God at Northern Beaches Anglicans. We ought to regularly express our thankfulness. **Fourth**, the awesome God revitalizes his people. The identity of the people named in this chapter summarized in **v1**, *'Now these are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive to Babylon (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to their own town,'* Seventy years before God's people were crushed and broken, taken into exile. Now signs of vitality and purpose. People honoured by God in the very act of naming them in Scripture. Not just a mass of unnamed exiles. Real people. With a heritage to

embrace. Returning to the towns from which their families had come. A history reminding us they are direct descendants of Abraham. The continuity of God's people unbroken, even by rebellion and exile. They know who they are. Revitalised and focused. Willing to give of themselves and their wealth to participate in God's restoring work. What an awesome God. Brothers and sisters, how are you participating in the divine work of rebuilding God's people? Are you in tune with the ways God is moving people's hearts here? For he is. How are you thanking God for his rebuilding in your life? This long list of unpronounceable names is our history, our story. These are our people. We too are descendants of Abraham. Spiritual descendants, grafted into the family by the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. We share in the benefit of God's promise keeping in returning our Old Testament brothers and sisters to the Promised Land. We walk with them in the sometimes tortuous path of following our awesome God. Falling and failing. Forgiven and reinstated. Upheld by his faithfulness. We can trust in the constant love of our awesome God. In his presence by the Holy Spirit. His gift of forgiveness through Jesus' death in our place. In his resurrection power that brings life from death. We can trust the word of God even in dark days. Christian hope depends on the plan, power and grace of God not on us. God knows the name of each of the returnees. He knows our name too. Jesus calls his own sheep by name. For every believer, the name God knows us by is written in the Lamb's book of life. Sisters and brothers, there is security, comfort and assurance in this. My Dad still forgets some things. God never forgets him. Our God is an awesome God.