

### Ezra 1

**1** Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, **2** Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah. **3** Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he *is* the God,) which *is* in Jerusalem. **4** And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that *is* in Jerusalem. **5** Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all *them* whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem. **6** And all they that *were* about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all *that* was willingly offered. **7** Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; **8** Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. **9** And this *is* the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, **10** Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second *sort* four hundred and ten, *and* other vessels a thousand. **11** All the vessels of gold and of silver *were* five thousand and four hundred. All *these* did Sheshbazzar bring up with *them* of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

### INTRODUCTION

The closing words of 2 Chronicles provided a summarized introduction to the Book of Ezra giving the historical background to the second captivity of the Jews in a foreign land, of which the first was Egypt and this second Babylon.

**2 Chronicles 36:14-23** *Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. 15 And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: 16 But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy. 17 Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand. 18 And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he brought to Babylon. 19 And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. 20 And them that had escaped from the*

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*sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: 21 To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years. 22 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, 23 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.*

2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-2 gives to us the connection of the little Hebrew nation and the great World Empires that emerges in history. The return of the Jews to Jerusalem by the decree of Cyrus marks the beginning of Israel's Second Exodus.<sup>1</sup>

From the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the deportation of the Jews to Babylonian, to the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy of their return to Jerusalem after 70 years, which we studied in the Book of Daniel, is the story of God's chastisement and eventual restoration of His people to true worship.

**Hebrews 12:6-7** *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*

**Hebrews 12:11-13** *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. 12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; 13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

The first Exodus of the Jews out of Egypt, we have studied before we studied the Book of Daniel, as led by Moses. This second Exodus was less impressive than the return from Egypt because only a remnant chooses to leave Babylon was led by Jeshua the high priest, and Zerubbabel the governor.<sup>2</sup>

In the first Exodus, the Tabernacle was constructed as a temporal replica of the Temple in Jerusalem that would be built after Israel enter the Promised Land.

In this second Exodus, in the Book of Ezra, is recounted the efforts of the exiles who returned from Babylon to rebuild the temple. Under the leadership of Jeshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the governor over the region, proper worship was restored in Jerusalem. When the life of God's people were centred in dependence upon their God as depicted by the setting of the Tabernacle in the wilderness, they thrived but when they begin to lose sight of the vitality of

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<sup>1</sup> Walter F. Adeney, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1900, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth D. Boa, The King James Open Bible, Nelson Bibles, 1985, 472.

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true worship, life took a turn for the worse. This is a true depiction of the Christian life for our admonition and learning.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one volume. The Vulgate (a Latin translation of the Scripture) was the first edition of the Bible to separate them, but at that time they were designated as First and Second Ezra. Like the Book of Daniel, portions of Ezra were also written in Aramaic, the language of Babylon (Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26).

Many years later, Ezra arrived in Jerusalem with another group of exiles. Ezra was the scribe who was commissioned by King Artaxerxes to teach the statutes of the Mosaic Law to the people in Israel. While there may have been many groups of exiles that returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, Scripture speaks of only three. The first group returned in **538 B.C.** under the leadership of **Zerubbabel**, the second in **457 B.C.** under **Ezra**, and the third in **444 B.C.** under **Nehemiah**.

<b>Chronological Relationship of Ezra-Nehemiah-Esther</b>				
538 – 515 B.C.	483 – 473 B.C.	457 B.C.	13 Year Gap	444 – 425B.C.
Ezra 1-6	Book of Esther	Ezra 7-10		Book of Nehemiah
First Return Of Jews from Babylonian Exile	58 Year Gap	Second Return of Jews from Babylonian Captivity		Third Return of Jews from Babylonian Exile

The Book of Ezra tells of the first two groups of exiles. Long periods of time are passed by without mention, however, because only those facts that are relevant to the religious life of Israel are given. Despite the fact that all those who desired to return to Jerusalem were free to do so, a great number of Jews chose to remain in Babylon. As a result, Babylon became an important center for Jewish learning until the city's decline near the end of the fourth century B.C. Nevertheless, God always has His faithful remnant that stands faithful in a faithless world. They may be the minority in the world but precious in God's sight and exercising a permeating as salt and light in a decaying, dark and godless world. Just like Daniel did in Babylon.

<b>Ezra: Restoration and Reform</b>			
<b>Restoration of the Temple Under Zerubbabel</b>		<b>Reform of the People Under Ezra</b>	
First Return to Jerusalem Ezra 1:1 – Ezra 2:70	Construction of The Temple Ezra 3:1 – Ezra 6:22	Second Return to Jerusalem Ezra 7:1 - 8:36	Restoration of the People Ezra 9:1 - Ezra 10:44
First Return of 49,897		Second Return of 1,754	
22 Years (538 - 516 B.C.)		1 Year (458 – 457 B.C.)	

God preserves His own for His own glory as He works out His purpose of redemption echoing the words of the psalmist David in psalm 12 who turned to Him by holding on to His forever inerrant, infallible and preserved word, will find peace and joy and spiritual prosperity in a faithless, decaying, godless and God blaspheming world.

**Psalm 12:1-8** *To the chief Musician upon Sheminith, A Psalm of David. Help, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. 2 They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. 3 The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: 4 Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us? 5 For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him. 6 The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. 7 Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. 8 The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.*

Two thoughts for our meditation (1) God is still on the Throne (v1-4) (2) And He Remembers His own (v5-11).

**(1) God is still on the Throne (v1-5)**

*1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, 2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.*

Have the Jews ever been forgotten by their God? No, God remembers. He cares for His own. He has power over the heart of kings. He directs and fulfills His purpose through them for the sake of His people. He stirred Cyrus to order the return of the Jews to rebuild their Temple.

Nearly 150 years before, Isaiah had predicted this event as recorded in Isaiah 44:28.

**Isaiah 44:28** *That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*

This establishes the truth that the God of Israel is the living and true God.

**Isaiah 45:4-6** *For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. 5 I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: 6 That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else.*

We may realize His awesome power and marvel at the preserving love for His people working out the plan of redemption for all mankind through the nation of Israel.

The command for their return did not come by a revolt but by a peaceful decree of a willing enemy suddenly turned friend!

**Proverbs 25:3** *The heaven for height, and the earth for depth, and the heart of kings is unsearchable.*

The deepest place on earth is probably the Marianas Trench, south-west of Guam in the Pacific Ocean. At the height of 36,198 feet (almost 11,000 metres), it is deep enough to contain Mount Everest. Such heights and depths are unsearchable. That's how unsearchable is the king's heart yet our God controls it. What a truth brought before us!

And so, we may safely entrust our lives for safekeeping by our Lord though trials may press us and burdens distress us, He never will leave us alone...

**3** *Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.*

Why would Cyrus, a pagan king, issue a decree for the Jews to return to Israel and rebuild their Temple? In the 19th century, the Cyrus Cylinder was discovered. It reveals that he had a policy of restoring people to their native lands and religions, asking them to pray to their gods on his behalf. A portion of it reads, "May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me" (cited by Kidner, p. 18).

But as our text shows, behind it all was the sovereign God turning this king's heart as channels of water to fulfill His purpose (Prov. 21:1).<sup>3</sup>

**Proverbs 21:1** *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.*

Is there anything too hard for the Lord? May His people who are in any difficulty realize that all is not lost, God is still on the throne. He remembers His own. This is our next thought.

## **(2) He Remembers His Own (v5-11)**

**5** *Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem. 6 And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered. 7 Also*

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fcfonline.org/content/1/sermons/081102m.pdf>

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*Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;*

Not only does He control the heart of men but He also owner of all the world's resources.

***Psalm 50:10-11*** *For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. 11 I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine.*

He not only moved Cyrus to pronounce the decree to build the Temple but provided the decree for the means to accomplish the task. God not only does not forget His people but His remembrance of them is backed by His ability to take action to help His people.

We can call upon our God for His help and He provides His help as we walk in His will. The building of the Temple led to the spiritual renewal, restoration and revival of true worship in Israel. So that the people of God once again the peace and joy and spiritual prosperity that God had intended them to enjoy.

***8*** *Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. 9* *And this is the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives, 10* *Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. 11* *All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.*

We recall how Balshazzar, in Daniel 5, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar did wantonly, in a feast, showed off his power and might by belittling the God of the Jews. He ordered that the vessels taken out of Israel's Temple in Jerusalem be used to serve wine for his guest. This act demonstrated his superior power and might. It was a time of utter wantonness. Yet we know that they are already a city under siege for the Median king Darius will take over the kingdom by the time chapter 5 ended. The last bastion of the once glorious Babylonian empire is now the city of Babylon itself. Ironically, they were living luxuriously like the frog in his bath water under a slow burning flame. By the time, he felt the heat, he is cooked.

The time of deliverance for Israel in captivity is approaching. The year is 539 B.C. Remember, Jeremiah told Judah that their captivity will be for a period of 70 years and Isaiah (Isaiah 44:28) told them that in the time of Cyrus they would be allowed to return to their homeland. By now, Daniel is well over 80 years old.

Our Lord was not oblivious of the ease of the wicked. We see how God's people must be pleading for relieve and justice as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, waiting upon the LORD until He will have mercy on

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them. Indeed, the proud, the scorning, the men at ease were wicked men. Will they get away with blasphemy? God Himself will vindicate His name.

We see in this text how God remembers His own and did help them. It may not be according to the desired time of the Jews but in the fullness of God's perfect time, He rescued His own.

This text tells us that in times of trial, we can be patient to trust God to work out His rescue plan.

**CONCLUSION**

May God's people today be encouraged to trust and wait upon Him and have confidence in His care for His own and His ability to help. Amen.