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Ezra 1

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Ezra 1

Topics.

- God has given Cyrus all kingdoms and charged him to build Jerusalem.
- God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to fulfil the words of Jeremiah.
- Cyrus's credits God for giving him all the kingdoms of the earth.
- Cyrus proclaims the LORD charged him to build the House of the LORD.
- Everyone whose spirit God stirred went to rebuild the Temple.
- Cyrus returns the vessels, Nebuchadnezzar had taken, to the Temple.
- Mithredath and Sheshbazzar count out the vessels of gold and silver.
- The symbolism of the chapter.

INTRODUCTION

The book of Ezra begins where 2 Chronicles ended as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 44:28) the Persian King Cyrus had sent exiles led by Zerubbabel back to Jerusalem in 538 B.C. (Persia had defeated Babylon in 539 B.C.). Despite opposition from the non-Jewish inhabitants of Judea, and after encouragement by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah the temple was rebuilt (515 B.C.). Then in 458 B.C., Ezra led the second of three waves of returning exiles. By the time Ezra arrived, the people had again fallen into sin, Ezra preached God's word and the people repented (10:9-17). Ezra succeeded because God's hand was upon him (Ezra 7:6, 9, 28) (Ezra 8:18, 22, 31). This book (probably written by Ezra), shows that God uses pagan kings to accomplish His purposes and His faithfulness to His promises and His people.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

EZRA 1:1-2

God has Given Cyrus all Kingdoms and to Build Jerusalem.

- **Ezra 1:1-2:** 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, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing:² "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia: (v1) the hearts of kings are in the hand of the LORD. God governs the world by His influence on the spirits of men whatever good they do. There is no doubt God used the following prophecies of Jeremiah concerning Cyrus to stir up his spirit.

EZRA 1:1

That the words of the LORD by Jeremiah might be fulfilled: (v1) Jeremiah spoke persistently to all the people of Judah, saying, that they have not listened to the word of the LORD, but continued to worship other

gods and walk in their evil ways and evil deeds, therefore God will send for Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, His servant, and bring his armies against them and devote them to destruction (Jer. 25:1-10). Jeremiah goes on to say that the LORD would:

- **Jeremiah 22:24-25:** give you (the people of Judah) into the hand of those who seek your life, into the hand of those of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans.
- **Jeremiah 25:11-13:** This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹² Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste. ¹³ I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.

Then in chapter twenty-nine we read:

- **Jeremiah 29:10:** “For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

Daniel refers to this this prophecy in the following verses:

- **Daniel 9:2:** in the first year of his (Darius) reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

The books referred to, were most likely a collection of the writings of Jeremiah, or a collection of writings that embraced his writings in amongst writings of their nation. Though the canon of the Scriptures was not yet completed, there would exist private collections of the writings, of which some are now contained in the Bible. The Jews in Babylon were obviously in possession of these sacred books, it is possible that sometime after the Jews had been sent to Babylon these Jewish books or a copy of them were sent to those in captivity. There is no doubt the Jew would have gone to great lengths to hide them in some safe place during the time of Babylon's invasion of Jerusalem so that they would not be burnt or lost. Daniel carefully read these books and found that the time of their captivity was fixed to a seventy-year period and that these years were almost about to expire

The LORD, the God of heaven: (v2) carries the idea that God is a single Supreme Being and not just the God of Israel, but the Creator of all and LORD of heaven.

Has given me all the kingdoms of the earth: (v2) though this is in the Oriental style of hyperbole (i.e., exaggeration, overstatement and overemphasis), a similar hyperbole, is used in the following verses:

- **Daniel 4:1:** King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you!

However, it was literally true that the Persian empire was the greatest ruling power in the world at that time.

Cyrus's statement, "He given me all the kingdoms of the earth," refers to the many kingdoms Cyrus had conquered before he took Babylon, and those parts of the world previously under the rule of the Assyrians and Babylonians. Cyrus credits this gift to the great God, either by his belief in a supreme God that ruled over all gods, which was a common idea held in the minds of the heathens, who worshipped idols, but more likely because of the following amazing and very specific words Isaiah prophesied concerning him.

- **Isaiah 44:28:** the LORD says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'

- **Isaiah 45:1-4:** Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: ² “I will go before you and level the exalted places, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, ³ I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. ⁴ For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me.
- **Isaiah 45:13:** I have stirred him (Cyrus) up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward,” says the LORD of hosts.

The Jews had clearly shown Cyrus this prophecy, and since it was spoken long before Cyrus was born it gave him great evidence that the LORD God was on his side.

EZRA 1:2

He has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem: (v2) it is safe to suppose that on the capture of Babylon, Cyrus was brought into contact with Daniel, who drew his attention to the prophecy of Isaiah and that Cyrus accepted this prophecy as a word from the God for him to rebuild the temple.

- **Isaiah 45:13-14:** I have stirred him (Cyrus) up in righteousness, and I will make all his ways level; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward,” says the LORD of hosts.”
- **Isaiah 44:28:** who says of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose’; saying of Jerusalem, ‘She shall be built,’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation shall be laid.’”

Here is the stunning wonder of the word of God, Isaiah prophesied this prophecy some two hundred years before Cyrus was born. Its predictions were so remarkable that they led Cyrus to acknowledge that all his kingdoms were gifts bestowed on him by “the Lord God of heaven,” and prompted him to fulfil the duty which had been laid upon him long before his birth. This prophecy was the source and origin of the great favour Cyrus showed to the Jews. Though the proclamation was issued in the first year of Cyrus (v1), it did not take effect till the following year.

EZRA 1:3-4

Let all Go up to Jerusalem and Rebuild the House of the LORD.

- **Ezra 1:3-4:** Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. ⁴ And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”

Whoever is among you of all his people: (v3) not of the tribe of Judah only, but of Israel also who were scattered amongst the Assyrians and surrounding nation under the government and rule of Cyrus. The edict of Cyrus not only granted full permission to all Jewish exiles, in every part of his kingdom, who chose, to return to their own country, but also recommend that those of their countrymen who remained were to aid the poor and feeble on their way, and contribute liberally towards the rebuilding of the temple.

EZRA 1:5-6

Everyone whose Spirit God Stirred went to Rebuild the Temple.

- **Ezra 1:5-6:** Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. ⁶ And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered (willingly offered in KJV).

Then rose up the chief of the fathers: (5-6) the ecclesiastical chiefs of, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with some also from other tribes. Men who were renowned, experienced, prominent and well-known men, who retained their attachment to the pure worship of God, naturally took the lead in this movement. Their example encouraged all whose godliness and patriotism was brave enough to face the various discouragements and obstacles that came with leaving what they had become familiar with, for many were born in Babylonia and had acquired property and established a comfortable family lifestyle and therefore chose to remain, but did assist the multitudes that did choose to return. It appears that many Jews and Assyrians living together during the Babylonian rule for seventy years had established favourable temperaments toward each other and some may even have been drawn to the Jewish faith, because many Assyrian friends and neighbours also aided the returning exiles.

Of Judah and Benjamin: (v5) but not limited to Judah and Benjamin only, but also some of the other tribes as the following verses show:

- **1 Chronicles 9:1-3:** So all Israel was recorded in genealogies, and these are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel. And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their breach of faith. ² Now the first to dwell again in their possessions in their cities were Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the temple servants. ³ And some of the people of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh lived in Jerusalem:

Only Judah and Benjamin are named, because they were the most in number.

Everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up: (v5) this carries the idea that those who had a reverence and love for God and longed for their homeland and to worship once again at the House of God in Jerusalem, God who works upon the heart to will and to do stirred up their spirit to enable them to overcome the many difficulties and discouragements which were in their way, such as:

- Their present poverty; the length of the journey and hazards on the way.
- The people being dispersed amongst various nations and distant places
- The multitude of enemies and the actual possession of much of their country by others.
- The ruinous state of Jerusalem and the many other cities and towns of Judea
- The great reluctance of many to relinquish their property and go with their brethren.
- The strong temptation for those who were comfortably settled in Babylon and had made friendly acquaintances to stay in Babylon.
- The fact many were well settled, and had a pleasing acquaintance with many of their neighbours.
- Many were born in captivity so where they lived was their native land and as for Judea and Jerusalem, they knew nothing but what their fathers had told them.
- The way to Jerusalem was unknown, long, dangerous and extremely fatiguing and troublesome for their wives and children.

- Judea and Jerusalem lay desolate and in ruins, and in the hands of enemies, from who they had reason to expect trouble.

Because of these difficulties and temptations many were reluctant to leave what they had become familiar with during their seventy years in exile or at least not willing to go with this second wave of people that went. However, those whose spirits God had raised up and who had a great affection for their own land and who had a deep desire for freedom to publicly exercise their faith broke through these difficulties. Had God left them to themselves, and the lure of the flesh they would have stayed in Babylon, but, as He had raised up the spirit of Cyrus to proclaim their freedom, likewise he raised up the spirits of this second wave to set their faces toward Zion and take full advantage of it.

- **Jeremiah 50:4-5:** “In those days (the days Babylon is taken), and in that time, declares the LORD, the people of Israel and the people of Judah shall come together, weeping as they come, and they shall seek the LORD their God. ⁵ They shall ask the way to Zion, with faces turned toward it, saying, ‘Come, let us join ourselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten.’

They went from the land of the Chaldees, to their earthy homeland.

- The first wave went with Zerubbabel.
- The second wave went with Ezra.
- The third wave went with Nehemiah.

NOTE: God moving and influencing the heart, does not mean that He by his Spirit influenced people who had no interest in returning, to return, for this would mean that God acted against their will, and this He does not do. The people that did return desired to return to their homeland, there is a mixture of God’s Spirit and our spirit working together in harmony. No one saved today can claim it is all their own doing, God by His Spirit draws, and those who have a desire toward God, respond with a willingness to His drawing.

It could be said, God woe, and we respond, God is the initiator, while we are the responders.

EZRA 1:7

Cyrus placed Vessels, Nebuchadnezzar had Taken into the Temple.

- **Ezra 1:7:** Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods.

The vessels here refer to those that Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem when he took the city and burnt it and placed in the temple of his gods in his palace at Babylon (2 Chron. 36:7). Cyrus ordered that these vessels are to be removed from Babylon’s temple and returned to the House of the LORD at Jerusalem. Some skeptics claim that this is a contradiction of the Bible, because the following verse says that the king of Babylon cut the vessels into pieces:

- **2 Kings 24:13:** and carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king’s house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the LORD, which Solomon king of Israel had made, as the LORD had foretold.

However, these two verses can be harmonised in the following way: it is very unlikely that they would have cut in pieces the magnificent vessels, that could be easily carried or transported by wagons to Babylon, especially since the following verse tells us that Nebuchadnezzar carried part of the vessels to Babylon and put them in his palace. (2 Chron. 36:7).

- **2 Chronicles 36:7:** Nebuchadnezzar also carried part of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon and put them in his palace in Babylon.

- **Daniel 1:1-2:** In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.

This means that some of all the items Nebuchadnezzar took to Babylon were cut in pieces (most likely those too big to transport) while some were carried or transported whole to Babylon. If some of the larger vessels of gold had been cut into two or more pieces, the pieces would have been delivered to the Jews, whose skillful craftsmen could, easily restore to their former pristine form. The following verses show that some of the vessels of the House of God were cut into pieces because the weight of them was too heavy to transport.

- **2 Kings 25:13-17:** And the pillars of bronze (brass in KJV) that were in the house of the LORD, and the stands and the bronze sea that were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried the bronze to Babylon. ¹⁴ And they took away the pots and the shovels and the snuffers and the dishes for incense and all the vessels of bronze used in the temple service, ¹⁵ the fire pans also and the bowls. What was of gold the captain of the guard took away as gold, and what was of silver, as silver. ¹⁶ As for the two pillars, the one sea, and the stands that Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weight. ¹⁷ The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and on it was a capital of bronze. The height of the capital was three cubits. A latticework and pomegranates, all of bronze (brass in KJV), were all around the capital. And the second pillar had the same, with the latticework.

EZRA 1:8-11

Mithredath and Sheshbazzar Count the Vessels of Gold and Silver.

- **Ezra 1:8-11:** Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. ⁹ And this was the number of them: 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers, ¹⁰ 30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels; ¹¹ all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.

Mithredath the king of Persia treasurer counts out the vessels of gold and silver to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.

30 ----- basins of gold.
 1,000 ----- basins of silver.
 29 ----- censers.
 30 ----- bowls of gold.
 410 ----- bowls of silver.
 1,000 ----- other vessels.
 TOTAL ----- 2499

This gives a total of 2,499 vessels of gold and silver, yet the verse specifies a total of 5,400, which means that it is likely only the larger vessels are mentioned, while the inventory of all the vessels, including the large and small came to the total stated in the verse.

SYMBOLSIM

The calls and offer of the Gospel can be likened to the proclamation of freedom Cyrus offered to the exiled Jews, in that those bound under the power of sin, may be made free by the proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ has opened the way for all sinners to be delivered out of the slavery of sin and death and raised to eternal life and transferred into the glorious liberty of the children of God who by repentance and faith, are received by Him. Like many exiles chose to sit still in Babylon, many are in love with their sins, and will not endeavour

to forsake them to live a godly life, while others willing embrace Jesus offer of freedom and overcome the discouragements, whatever it cost them; they by the Holy Spirit of God rise above the world and the flesh and enter into the heavenly Canaan. Though many choose to sit still and perish in Babylon, the proclaiming of the Gospel invitation is not made in vain. In the same manner that the proclamations of Cyrus brought many Jews from captivity to the Holy City Jerusalem and the House of God, many sinners will be brought to God by repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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