

Lesson 2 The Proclamation of Cyrus

Key Themes in the Book of Ezra

- Yahweh's covenantal faithfulness and man's covenantal unfaithfulness
- Yahweh sovereignly and providentially works out his redemptive purpose in history despite human evil.
- Yahweh's intention for Israel for purity in worship and obedience to the law
- Yahweh's grace and mercy exceed his anger
- Sinful man's need for a changed heart

Background

The author of the book of Ezra is unknown, but most scholars believe that Ezra himself wrote the book. Ezra was a Jewish scribe, well versed in the Torah. He led a second group of Jewish exiles on a long journey from Babylon to Jerusalem around the year 458 BC. The first group had previously returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel about 538 BC.. Chapters 1-6 of Ezra tell the story of the first group's return and the rebuilding of the temple. Chapters 7-10 relate the story of the second group's return and the rebuilding of the community. Both groups returned to Jerusalem with the God given hope of rebuilding the nation. First and foremost was the rebuilding of the temple, the place where God dwelt among His chosen people.

Cyrus: He was a Persian who organized an army and led a revolt against both his father and grandfather who ruled there. He claimed the Persian throne and then proceeded to carve out an empire that stretched from the Aegean Sea to India and included the country of Babylon. One of his administrative strategies was to permit the peoples that he conquered to continue to worship their own gods. He felt that this policy would minimize revolts against his rule. At the time of his rule, most of the Jews who had been conquered by Babylon in 586 BC were living as prisoners in exile in Babylon.

Key Words and Phrases:

fulfill : Strong's H3615 "kalah" to be accomplished, to be completed

stirred up: Strong's H5782 "ur" from a primitive root meaning "to open the eyes." to awaken, arouse, incite. When this verb is used with God as its subject it shows God's active involvement in the flow of history.

house : Strong's H1004 "bayith": a house or temple in the OT. **Key Phrase "the house of the Lord"** which in Hebrew is "beth Yahweh " and means the house of Yahweh or the house where Yahweh dwells.

rebuild: Strong's H1129 "bana" to build or rebuild.

Read Ezra 1:1-4

In the past Yahweh used the ruling nation of Babylon to discipline Judah, conquer its people, and take them into exile. Now he used the same nation under Persian rule and Cyrus its King to restore the nation.

1. According to Ezra 1:1 who did God stir up and why? What was the "word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah"? See Jeremiah 25:11-12 and Jeremiah 29:11. When Cyrus' spirit was "stirred up" what did it cause him to do?

2. The prophet Isaiah wrote about King Cyrus and the role he would play in the history of Israel hundreds of years before Cyrus was born. Read Isaiah 45:1-7. What are some of the things Yahweh did for Cyrus? According to verses 4-7 for whose sake did the Lord act? Did Cyrus know the Lord?

3. The decree of Cyrus can be found in Ezra 1:2-4. Read through the decree and answer the following: How did Cyrus describe God? What did the decree specifically order? How was that to be accomplished? In giving this decree, do you think Cyrus was politically or spiritually motivated?

4. The author of Ezra seems to be tying the deliverance and return of the Jews from Babylon (Persia) to the previous exodus from Pharaoh in Egypt. Read Exodus 12:31-36 and compare it with Ezra 1:2-4. Look for the similarities. Note especially the reason for both exoduses.

Application: What can you learn from Ezra 1:1-4 about God? How does what you just learned in verses 1-4 relate to your own personal experience and walk with God?

