

Lesson 3 The Response to 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

Levites: The Levites were from the tribe of Levi. The Levites as a tribe did not have a specific portion of land allotted to them. Instead a small part of the tribe lived within the borders of the land assigned to the 11 other tribes. The Levites spoken of in chapter 1 of Ezra had most likely been living in the land of Judah and Benjamin. They had been taken hostage to Babylon along with the rest of the captives.

Priests: The priests were a group of qualified men within the tribe of Levi who had the responsibility to oversee the care of the Temple and the Temple worship. All priests were Levites according to the law but not all Levites were priests.

Articles of the temple: the objects used in worship in the temple in Jerusalem. These articles were taken hostage by the Babylonians when they conquered the Jews in 586 BC. This act was a way of demonstrating the power of the god of the conquering nation over the god of the defeated nation.

The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem: the most likely route was north up the Euphrates to either Mari or Carchemish. From there it was south to Damascus and then on to Jerusalem. It was about 900 miles and would take from 2 to 4 months.

Sheshbazzar: He is the "prince of Judah" (Ezra 1:8) and the governor (Ezra 5:14). He is most likely the last son of Jehoiachin and Zerubbabel is his nephew. They are both part of the "royal blood" of Judah.

Key Words and Phrases:

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 1:5-11

1. According to Ezra 1:5 who did God "stir up" to rebuild the house of the Lord in Jerusalem? How would each of these groups of people contribute to the rebuilding of the nation and the temple? How would each group provide the newly restored nation a connection with the past?

2. When God calls His people to a task or ministry, He provides for them. What did God provide for those who planned to return to Jerusalem? See 1:6-11. Who did God motivate to provide for them. How do you think the returning exiles would use that which was provided?

Application: Did the exiles receive the provisions before or after they chose to obey? How can this be an encouragement for you to obey God's word?

3. Again we see a parallel between this exodus from Babylon (Persia) and the previous exodus from Egypt. Read again Exodus 12:31-36 and see if you can find additional similarities.

Application: Drawing upon your knowledge of the original Exodus story and what we have learned in Ezra thus far regarding the returning exiles, how might you relate those events to your own deliverance by Yahweh from the bondage of sin?

