

# That the Word of the Lord Might Be Fulfilled – Ezra 1:1-8

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Read 1 Timothy 2:1-6

### B. New Book – Ezra

1. As we've now finished 2 Corinthians, we return to the OT to look at 3 books, Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther because they all deal with the same period of history.
2. The Kingdom of Judah had been conquered & deported by the Babylonians 70 years before.
  - a. The Babylonians left Judah vacant, & over the years it became a wild, desolate ruin.
  - b. After several decades, the Babylonians were in turn defeated by the Persians.
  - c. While the Babylonians shuffled those they conquered to new lands, the Persians followed a different policy.
  - g. They allowed those who'd been displaced to **return** to their ancestral homes.
3. The Book of Ezra tells the story of the return of the Jews to Judah & Jerusalem to rebuild.

## II. TEXT

### A. Vs. 1-2a

**<sup>1</sup> 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, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, <sup>2</sup> Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:**

1. Before reading the proclamation, let's take a closer look Ezra's introduction of it.
2. Cyrus was the leader who **united** the Medes & Persians & led them in conquest of the legendary city of Babylon.
3. In his first year as ruler over Babylon, God moved Cyrus to issue this proclamation allowing the Jews to return to their lands to rebuild.
4. The **reason** God stirred him to this is because the prophet Jeremiah foretold it nearly a hundred years earlier.
5. Judah's defeat & exile was the judgment of God for their long rebellion against Him.
  - a. Though God warned them for many years about the sin of worshipping idols, Judah ignored the prophets He sent, growing ever more arrogant in their rebellion against Him.
  - b. One of the judgments had to do with their failure to keep the **sabbath year**.
    - 1) Along with the **weekly** sabbath, the Jews were to observe an **annual** sabbath.
    - 2) Every 7<sup>th</sup> year they were to let their fields lie fallow, only harvesting what came up of its own accord.

- 3) The sabbath year allowed the soil to *replenish*, but even more—it *renewed* their dependence on the Lord.
  - 4) Sadly, for 490 years Israel *failed* to keep the sabbath year.
  - 5) So *twice*, Jeremiah told the people they would be exiled for 70 years to allow the land to enjoy its long overdue rest. [Jeremiah 25:11-14; 29:10]
  - c. He also foretold the *defeat* of the Babylonians by *another empire* that would allow the Jews to return & rebuild.
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6. Ezra, who wrote this, was a priest & scribe; his specialty was to make new scrolls of God’s Word.
    - a. As we read his book & the parallel story in Nehemiah were he turns up as well, we realize this was a man who *prized the Scriptures*.
    - b. He was a careful student & had devoted his life to teaching God’s Word to His people.
    - c. Ezra knew Judah had been defeated & deported *precisely because* they turned from God.
    - d. The key to making sure they didn’t fall to judgment again was by *keeping* God’s Word.
  7. As he read Jeremiah, he saw how God had spoken through him to reveal that Israel’s exile would last 70 years, then they would return to rebuild.
  8. So when Cyrus issued his decree, Ezra knew it was God’s Spirit moving him to do it.
  9. It was all so that → **The Word of the Lord might be fulfilled.**
  10. File that away, we’ll come back to it later.
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11. Another amazing detail about this 1<sup>st</sup> verse is that a hundred years *before Jeremiah’s* time, *another* prophet named Isaiah foretold the **NAME** of the ruler who would allow the Jews to return.
    - a. In Isaiah 44, we find this –
- 24 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, . . . [I] say of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, & he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, “You shall be built,” & to the temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.” ’**
- b. A few verses later, Isaiah again names Cyrus, telling him he’ll conquer many nations, which of course he did in his defeat of the Babylonian Empire. [45:1]
  - c. Yet Isaiah lived some 200 years before Cyrus.
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12. Because of the amazing detail in these prophecies, skeptics assume they must have been written *after* the fact.
  13. But several archaeological discoveries over the last hundred years have verified the ancient text.
  14. Fulfilled prophecy is a powerful evidence for the divine inspiration of the Scriptures.
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15. Now we get to the proclamation itself. Cyrus declared . . .

**B. Vs. 2b-4**

**All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD [Yahweh] God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at**

### **Jerusalem which *is* in Judah.**

1. Two words here lead us to the conclusion someone *showed* Cyrus the prophecies of Isaiah & Jeremiah.
  - a. **First** is his use of the covenant name for God.
  - b. **Second** is the reference to rebuilding the temple which Isaiah spoke of. That Cyrus mentions that specifically in his decree most certainly means he knew of the prophecy.

### **<sup>3</sup> Who *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 build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He *is* God), which *is* in Jerusalem.**

2. Cyrus' quick comment about Yahweh being the real God may be an indication that seeing the prophecies regarding him had brought him to faith in the Lord.
3. Another potent witness to the Truth was the prophet Daniel who served in Cyrus' court. He's more than likely the one who showed Cyrus the prophecies of Isaiah & Jeremiah.

### **<sup>4</sup> And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem.**

4. Cyrus not only gave permission for the return of the Jews, he made provision for the transfer of wealth to those returning so they could rebuild.

### **C. Vs. 5-8**

### **<sup>5</sup> Then the heads [leaders] of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin,**

1. These were the 2 tribes of Israel that had occupied the Kingdom of Judah. **and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem.**

2. The Book of Ezra tells us of **2 returns**;
  - a. Chs. 1-6 is the 1<sup>st</sup>, led by Zerubbabel with about 50,000 who returned.
  - b. Chs. 7-10 is the 2<sup>nd</sup>, led several years later by Ezra with 2,000.

### **<sup>6</sup> And all those who *were* around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all *that* was willingly offered.**

3. While 50,000 made the 1<sup>st</sup> return, many times **more** Jews remained in Babylon where after 70 years of exile they'd settled down & made new lives for themselves.
4. They were doing well & gave from their wealth to those who returned so they could make a fresh start.

### **<sup>7</sup> King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; <sup>8</sup> and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.**

5. Sheshbazzar was the Babylonian name for **Zerubbabel**, the next in line in the

royal dynasty of David for the throne. He's the one who led this first group of returnees.

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#### **D. The King's Heart**

1. I thought it would be good for us to look at this passage this morning because of what it can teach us about *our* lives & time.
  2. On Wed., Nov. 5<sup>th</sup>, many Christians woke up, turned on the news & concluded the world was coming to an end.
    - a. The presidential race saw people on *both* sides who were sure the *other* guy was a villain.
    - b. There were charges made about Barak Obama that *terrified* the supporters of John McCain.
  3. Time will tell what kind of a leader President Obama will be.
  4. What we must do is keep our eyes fixed on *heaven*, not *Washington DC*; on the throne room *up there*, not the Oval Office *over there*.
  5. This passage ought to be of great encouragement to us.
    - a. For here we read of a pagan king God moved to accomplish His will.
    - b. The 70 years of exile foretold by Jeremiah were at an end, so God stirred Cyrus to make a proclamation allowing the Jews to return.
    - c. He even granted them the resources to rebuild.
  6. And all so that the Word of the Lord would be fulfilled.
  7. God had spoken, so it could not, have **NOT** happened!
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8. In Proverbs 21:1 we find this amazing promise –  
**The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD. Like the rivers of water, He turns it wherever He wishes.**
9. This is a mystery. I do not understand it.
    - a. God gives us the power to choose & honors the choices we make.
    - b. Having bestowed free-will upon us, He doesn't then force His will upon us.
    - c. Yet as God He's *utterly* free & sovereign, so that *our* choices never force Him either.
    - d. Because God is all-powerful, all-knowing, & being eternal knows the end from the beginning, He's able to move all things forward according to His perfect will without violating our will.
  10. Cyrus was free, yet God's Word said he would send the Jews back to rebuild.
    - a. Without violating Cyrus' will, God's Spirit worked *in such a way upon him that he chose* to issue the proclamation.
    - b. Just as the Proverb said, Cyrus' heart was in God's hand.
  11. I've always found that Proverb fascinating because God likens the king's heart in His hand to a river.
    - a. It's a *wonderful* analogy.
    - b. You see, it's the nature of a river to flow; that water *is* going *somewhere*!
    - c. Ultimately, it's going to the sea; that's its destiny.
    - d. But the *route* it takes to get there isn't determined *by the river*; it's determined *by the terrain*.
    - e. The river is going flow, but its route is determined by factors *beyond its control*.
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12. God has a plan for history & that plan has been outlined by the prophets.

- a. The future is set, the end is already written.
  - b. Time has a destiny, a final sea it will empty in to.
  - c. Here we are, somewhere up in the hills rushing toward the future's horizon.
  - d. We make our choices freely, but the course we ultimately take is determined by factors beyond our control.
  - e. Though we are indeed free, ***God is freer yet.***
  - f. His Kingdom WILL come, His will, WILL BE DONE on Earth as it is in Heaven.
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- 13. We must hold on to this truth.
  - 14. We dare not fret or fear because of who occupies the White House.
  - 15. Such fear as that is unbelief.
  - 16. If God can stir the Persian king to fulfill His Word, can He not move an American President?
    - a. Was God bummed on the evening of Nov. 4<sup>th</sup> when the polls closed?
    - b. Did He turn to Gabriel & say, "Oops! Well I wasn't counting on that. What am I going to do now?"
  - 17. We have a new President who ran on a campaign of "Change We can Believe In."
  - 18. The truth of the matter is, nothing of consequence has ***really changed!***
  - 19. God is still in control & His Word ***will*** be fulfilled.
  - 20. So don't wig out when the news reports this or that move by the White House or Congress.
    - a. Already this week, as the new administration made moves to implement some of their campaign promises, I found myself saying, "Oh no! This could be bad."
    - b. Without doubt the federal government ***will*** make mistakes, some of them could be serious, ***dangerous even.***
    - c. May they only serve to remind us that our hope isn't in man – it's in God alone.
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Psalm 121

- 1 I will lift up my eyes to the hills— From whence comes my help?**
- 2 My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth.**
- 3 He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.**
- 4 Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.**
- 5 The LORD is your keeper; The LORD is your shade at your right hand.**
- 6 The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night.**
- 7 The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul.**
- 8 The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in From this time forth, and even forevermore.**

### III. CONCLUSION

### **A. Pray for Those In Authority**

1. As we end today, want to take note of 2 quick things.
2. 1<sup>st</sup> = Remember what we began with today in 1 Timothy 2.
3. We must pray for our civil leaders at every level, especially the President.
4. Never forget that his heart is in God's hand.
  - a. Obama will make his choices, but God will direct the outcome to accomplish what He ordains.
  - b. This is why we ought to pray, "Your kingdom come & Your will be done in the Oval Office, in the Halls of Congress, in Sacramento, as it is in heaven."
  - c. **Your** prayers **do** make a difference!
  - d. They're part of **HOW** God directs the choices of rulers to accomplish **His** will.

### **B. The Word-Filter**

1. 2<sup>nd</sup> = Take careful note of **how** Ezra filtered current events through the lens of Scripture.
2. He wrote in v. 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, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom.**
3. If there was a *Babylonian Herald Tribune* it would have carried the headline, "His Majesty the King Issues Proclamation Mandating Return of Jews to Homeland."
4. But Ezra knew what was **really happening** was that everything was playing out as God had said.
5. He'd read the words of the prophets & understood the events of his time **in light of them**.
6. There are skeptics today, even some of a religious-stripe, who **scoff** at the idea of understanding current events as the fulfillment of prophecy.
  - a. If they'd lived during Ezra's time they'd have laughed at his what they call "unsophisticated" faith.
  - b. They say prophecy isn't to be taken literally but has to be understood as **spiritual symbolism**, & can only be properly interpreted by those **specialty schooled** in it.
  - c. They would have been wrong **then**; they're wrong **today**.
7. Just as there were prophecies about Cyrus & the return of the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem,
8. There are many prophecies about the Return of Christ.
9. That the Word of the Lord might be fulfilled, God has positioned the nations & circumstances of the world just as has been foretold.
10. You don't need special training to see the fulfillment of these things; they've come to pass in recent years **literally!**
11. While it seems the entire world is **looking to** the new American President as a kind of savior,
12. Christian → Keep your eyes on the skies.