

## EZRA 1

## KING CYRUS' DECREE

The prophet Jeremiah foretold that the captive Jews would return to their own homeland at the expiration of 70 years – dating from 607 BC, when the first group of Hebrews was taken to Babylon, along with their king Jehoiachin. And even before Jeremiah's time, Isaiah had predicted that this would take place under a king named Cyrus – decades before he was even born (Isa. 44:28–45:4). When the 70 years had expired, in 537 BC, the Babylonian empire had ceased to exist; and Cyrus the Persian had become master of the many different realms of which the kingdom of Babylon had been composed.

In the very first year of his imperial reign, King Cyrus issued a decree which distinctly recognized those Divinely inspired prophecies – acknowledging the authority by which they were given, and his obligation to act upon them. The hearts of kings and politicians are in the hands of the Lord; and like little streams of water, He turns them whichever way He pleases. Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to their own country and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. He also allowed them to collect funds from those who chose to remain behind in Babylon, and he gave them the promise of his royal protection and encouragement in the undertaking. Accordingly, a large caravan was formed of the more devout and zealous Jews; and they were generously supplied with treasure from the bounty of those who preferred to remain in Babylon. King Cyrus took care that assistance was given to those Jews who wished to return, but could not afford the travel expenses. He also ordered that the Jews should be given back the vessels which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. The Jews' leader in this expedition, who went with the king's appointment of being governor of the colony, was a direct descendant of the family of David. He was the grandson of Judah's former King Jeconiah, and his name was Zerubbabel; but he also had another name: Sheshbazzar.

The call and offer of the Gospel are like Cyrus' proclamation. Deliverance is preached to the captives! (Luke 4:18) Those who are bound under the unrighteous dominion of sin, and condemned to the righteous judgment of God, may be made free by Christ! If anyone wishes – by repentance and faith – to return to his God, Jesus has opened the way for him. Let him go up out of the slavery of sin, into the glorious liberty of the sons and daughters of God! This offer is made to all. Sadly, however, many people hear this joyful sound, and choose to sit still in the Babylon of this world; they are in love with their sins, and will not venture to leave them and encounter the difficulties of a holy life.

**Outline of the chapter:**

- ❖ *Cyrus proclaims the release of the captive Jews and permits them to rebuild the Temple – verses 1-4*
- ❖ *Many Jews prepare to return to Jerusalem – verses 5-6*
- ❖ *Orders are given for the restoration of the vessels of the Temple – verses 7-11*



But happily, there are some who break through the discouragements and resolve to build the house of God – no matter what it costs them. And these are the ones whose spirit God has raised above the world and the flesh, and whom He has made willing in the day of His power (Ps. 110:3).

Cyrus ordered that the Jews' neighbors should help them, and they did. All the people who were around them provided them with silver, gold, and goods for the journey to Jerusalem – as well as for the expenses of building, and for furnishing their own homes and Jehovah's Temple. Just as Moses' Tabernacle was set up by the spoils of Egypt, and Solomon's Temple was built with the assistance of foreigners to Israel; so also, the second Temple was raised by the contributions of the Babylonians. And all of these instances foreshadowed the admission of Gentiles (non-Jews) into the New Testament Church after the coming of Christ.



King Cyrus himself seconded his proclamation. To give proof of the sincerity of his affection for the house of Jehovah, he not only released the people of God, but he also restored the vessels of His Temple. How carefully did the Lord's Providence preserve these holy vessels for 70 years! They were not lost, melted down, or mixed up with other treasures while the Jews were in Babylon; and they were all returned now, in order to furnish the new Temple. Such is the care that God also has for His children, who are living vessels of mercy; they are the vessels of honor, of whom it is said in 2 Timothy 2:19-20 that "the Lord knows those that are his, and they shall none of them perish." To Sheshbazzar, these sacred vessels were numbered out; and he took care for their safe conveyance to Jerusalem. This would encourage the returning exiles to work diligently and build the Temple, when they saw that they had so much rich furniture ready to put into it when it was finished.

*Lord, we praise You as the God of mercy, Who builds up Your Church, the spiritual Jerusalem; and Who shows favor to Your exiled people, and brings them home to Yourself! (Ps. 147:1-11) We thank You for taking wonderful care of us – Your vessels of mercy – just as You cared for the Temple vessels and ensured that they were delivered safely into the hands of Sheshbazzar. Thank You for the assurance that You know all those who are Yours, and that none of them shall perish! Amen.*