

BOOK OF EZRA
WHO GOD USES TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL
EZRA 1:1-6

Ezra 1:1a

There are so many questions in life, aren't there? For at least 3000 years, philosophers have worked on trying to answer the questions of life—

Who am I?

Why am I here?

Where am I going?

What is real?

How do I know?

As Bible-believing Christians, those questions might seem strange because we find the answers to those questions in Scripture! But sometimes we have some questions that are hard for us to answer too, don't we?

How exactly does God work in the world?

Where do I fit in to God's plans?

What if I am disobedient—will that hamper God's plans?

Can my disobedience stop God's will from being accomplished?

Those are hard questions for some. But to answer hard questions, you have to start with what you know.

If we truly understand exactly WHO GOD IS, then the question has never been whether God would keep His promises!

God is always, always, always faithful!

Years before—even before Judah was carried away into captivity, God spoke some words to His prophet Jeremiah recorded in **Jeremiah 29:10-14**.

Our God is a personal God and He is a faithful God and He is a sovereign God!

He loves His people! He speaks His Word to them! He makes them promises! And He keeps His promises! The Bible consistently testifies to that!

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The fact that God has given us His Word in the first place speaks of His personality! His faithfulness and love are evident on every page! When the Bible is taken at face value, there is absolutely no questioning the faithfulness of God! Just like we just read here in Ezra 1:1—*“that the word of the Lord might be fulfilled.”*

So, the question isn't whether or not God's Word will be fulfilled. The real question is “how?” Once again, the pages of Scripture consistently reveal how God chooses to fulfill His Word....with people!

If you ever look at any of the writings from other world religions, one thing stands out. Many of those writings focus on mystical things—things that don't involve people at all.

God doesn't work that way! He chooses to work His will through people! We can see that most every page of Scripture concerns God's relationship with people!

Once again, there is no questioning the fact that God chooses to use people to accomplish His will! He is faithful to fulfill His promises and He is going to use people to do it! That's the *“what”* and the *“how.”* But that leaves us with one more very important question—*“who?”* **Who is it that God uses to accomplish His Will?**

As we already read, Ezra opens with the plain declaration that God speaks His Word and what He speaks will be accomplished!

Sometimes we think we have to be obedient to God for His will to be accomplished! While that may be true in our personal lives, we need to understand that God doesn't depend on us for anything to fulfill the plans and purposes of His will! (e.g. What Mordecai said to Esther in Esther 4:14)

Make no mistake about it, God's sovereign will revealed in His Word is going to be accomplished whether we're obedient or not!

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So where do we fit in?

Understand that even though we can never expedite or stifle God's plans, our level of obedience will determine our reward! Don't you want to be the kind of person who is used of God for His purposes and then receives the reward that God desires us to receive?

In order to do that, we're going to look at **three kinds of people God uses to accomplish His Word!**

I. GOD USES RULERS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WORD!
(Ezra 1:1-4)

There is a lot of talk about who our next president is going to be! Doesn't it seem like it's always political season these days? It seems as soon as one election is over, somebody starts campaigning for the next one.

Did you know that God is never surprised at the outcome of an election? No matter who the nominees of the political parties wind up being—God will not be surprised. No matter who winds up winning the next presidential election, God isn't going to be glued to the TV next November to find out who it is going to be!

He's not going to be wringing His hands hoping the right person gets in office! Romans 13:1 tells us *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God."*

Psalm 118:9—"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes."

Psalm 146:3-5—3 Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. 4 His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. 5 Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the LORD his God:

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Psalm 75:6-7 – 6 For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. 7 But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.

We, as God's people, need to understand that God places whom He will in positions of power! No government has ever existed whose leader was not sovereignly appointed by God!

Yes, that includes Reagan, both Bushes, Clinton, Obama and whoever the next one is! It also includes Pol Pot and Stalin and Mussolini and Hitler!

It included the Pharaohs, and Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar and Darius, and Artaxerxes, and Herod, and the Caesars, and Nero.

And we see here that it included Cyrus. Cyrus the Great was a Persian who overthrew the Babylonian empire a little over 500 years before Jesus was born.

The Medo-Persian Empire that Cyrus reigned over was the greatest world empire to that date! In our Wednesday evening Bible Studies we've seen how that the Medo-Persian Empire was one of four great Gentile world empires that God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel!

For all intents and purposes, Cyrus was king of the world! He was very politically correct. He believed that everybody's religions were basically the same. They just had different names for their gods. So he wanted everybody to worship their gods like they were supposed to. He wanted to treat everybody's gods nice so the people would support him.

He could have been running for office in 2016, couldn't he? But don't get the idea that Cyrus was a nice guy.

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He was ruthless to his enemies! But God placed him in that position! How do we know that? Over a century and a half before Cyrus was even born, God gave a prophesy to Isaiah recorded in *Isaiah 44:28*: “*That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*”

Even though Cyrus was a pagan king of a pagan empire, God used him! He used him just like He uses every other national and world leader! He uses them for the express purpose of working His will in the world!

Even though Cyrus didn't truly acknowledge or submit to God's authority, God used him! God used him to fulfill His Word! But because Cyrus didn't personally submit to God, God didn't reward him!

God only rewards obedience! God used Cyrus to work His will for Israel! But because of his disobedience, Cyrus missed the blessing! He missed the reward!

Instead, he got what was prophesied by Jeremiah in *Jeremiah 25:12-14*: “*And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations. And I will bring upon that land all my words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah hath prophesied against all the nations. For many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of them also: and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the works of their own hands.*”

God uses kings to accomplish His Word. If those nations are obedient to Him, they receive His blessing and reward!

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However, if they are disobedient to Him, they receive His punishment! But either way, God's will, will be done!

GOD USES RULERS TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WORD...

II. GOD USES HIS PEOPLE TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WORD!
(EZRA 1:5)

Now this is more like what we expect, isn't it? These are the kinds of people we have in our mind that God is supposed to use! Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites!

These were God's people who were called by His name! His chosen people! Did you notice how it all got started? It got started with God! God raised their spirits up! The words “*raised up*” here are translated from the exact same word that the words “*stirred up*” are translated back in verse 1!

God stirred His people up in much the same way that He stirred Cyrus up! God sovereignly worked in the lives of His people to motivate them to accomplish His will! God initiated the action! He did the stirring! He stirred up the people! And He stirred up the priests! He stirred up the Levites! And then they got busy!

Understand that God can use whatever means He wishes to stir our spirits! And make no mistake about it, if God wants us stirred up He is able to do the job Himself by whatever means necessary! He can use His Word to stir! But He can also use circumstances to get us where we need to be to be stirred to accomplish His Word!

We are not told what God used specifically here to stir His people to accomplish His Word and be obedient, but that doesn't really matter! God used His people to accomplish His Word, they were obedient, and because of that He blessed them. How? With His presence!

Look at *Zechariah 2:10-13*.

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Zechariah and Haggai were both prophets who God sent specifically to these people we're talking about in Ezra. And in Zechariah 2:10-13, God told the people exactly what their reward was going to be because of their obedience to Him.

Sing and rejoice! What a blessing they were going to receive for their obedience. It's not that they were somehow "*helping God out*".

There wasn't anything they could do to "*help out*" an all-powerful God. It's not a picture of God and His people working side-by-side to get the job done!

No—God's will is always going to be accomplished! With or without our obedience! But when we obey, the blessings are unimaginable! But what happens when we are disobedient? We've seen what happens to rebellious kings that God uses! What about regular lost people? Does God use them to keep His Word too? Look with me at verse 6:

III. GOD USES OTHER PEOPLE TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WORD!
(EZRA 1:6)

God not only uses kings and His own people to accomplish His Word, He uses other people, lost people, too!

Are there any other examples in Scripture of God using them? Balaam in the Old Testament. Judas Iscariot in the New Testament.

But these folks in this verse bring to mind another group of lost folks that God used. Remember back to the Exodus? Remember after God brought the plagues on Egypt? Remember after that first Passover when the death angel passed over the houses of the Israelites? And how he killed the firstborn of every other household in Egypt? Remember how Pharaoh finally decided to let God's people go?

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What did the rest of the people do? *Exodus 12:35-36* describes it: "*And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians.*"

That word "**spoiled**"—it means "**plundered.**" Just like a victorious army would plunder a nation they had conquered!

Psalms 105:38 says, "*Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them.*"

That is the very similar to what happened here in Ezra 1:6. God used the lost people of Babylon by allowing His people to plunder them without drawing a single sword! And by doing that, He accomplished His Will!

Now, does that mean that God will accomplish His will by allowing us to plunder our lost neighbors? No—probably not! But it does mean that He can and will use the actions of lost people to accomplish His will!

His will for the Jews in the first part of Ezra was for them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. To do that, they needed resources. God used lost people to provide them with the resources they needed!

They were not God's people! They didn't get to participate in the blessing God had for His people. Instead, they were plundered. Not only did they miss out on the blessing of God's presence, they lost their stuff too.

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And that wasn't the worst of it. As that passage we read in Jeremiah 25 said, because of their disobedience, their whole nation would be punished—not just Cyrus. God would make it “*perpetual desolations*”.

So many times we get in our minds that God only uses certain people. You might think that God only uses preachers or deacons or Sunday school teachers.

The fact is, God uses everybody to accomplish His will! He has made promises and will keep His promises! He will keep His Word and He will use everybody to do it!

The question is not who is He going to use! More specifically, your question shouldn't be, “Is God going to use me?” He is going to use you whether you want Him to or not.

So whether or not He's going to use you is not the question. The question you have to ask yourself is, “*Am I going to be obedient to the way He wants to use me?*”

You see, it's not a matter of usefulness. God is our creator—He has every right to use us in any way He sees fit. It's not a matter of usefulness, it's a matter of willingness.

Are you obediently willing for the Lord to use you? Obediently willing to go where He asks? Obediently willing to do what He asks? Obediently willing to serve Him, worship Him, love Him, and give Him glory both in and through your life? How far are you willing to go? To the point of discomfort? To the point of inconvenience? To the point of self-sacrifice? To the point of death?

It is only through our obedience that we are used for God's highest purpose in our lives and receive the rewards of obedience!

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It's a matter of willingness, of preparedness and a matter of faithfulness.

Are you faithful in the work that the Lord has called you to do?

Are you faithful to do the work and leave the results up to Him?

He will accomplish His will! He will keep His Word!

He will take care of the results! Are you faithful to His call?

If you are willing, prepared and faithful, God's Word will be fulfilled.

But, even if you are not willing, prepared or faithful, God's Word will be fulfilled!

But Jesus tells of the difference in a parable in *Matthew 24:45-51*:

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

God's will, will be accomplished. Will you be rejoicing as a ruler when it happens? Or will you be weeping and gnashing your teeth? God's going to use you—how are you going to be used?