

Ezra 1:1-11 “Stirred by the Lord”

For the Children: In battle, armies sometimes have to retreat in order to come back and win another day. God’s people in Babylon were in danger of becoming like the unbelievers there. They had to leave, so that God would bring them to the point where they could go out into the world later, to tell everyone about the Lord Jesus. God made sure that they would leave by stirring up King Cyrus and moving His own people to return to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. **Questions:** What are some ways in which God uses unbelieving rulers to carry out His purposes? What kind of dangers do God’s people face in the world? How did the return to Jerusalem make God’s people think of their true Messiah?

Introduction:

First Point: A Lesson in God's Sovereignty

- 1) Sovereign over the Nations: The Lord is the One who “stirred up” Cyrus to allow the Jews who to return to Jerusalem, and to ensure their financial support. Cyrus saw himself as “appointed” by God for the rebuilding of His Temple. That it was all in the Lord’s plan – even down to the timing – is seen by the earlier prophecies about this event (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10; 51:1,11; Is. 41:2,25; 44:28, 45:1,13). If the Lord can move the greatest power in that part of the world at that time, obviously He rules all the nations, using their rulers as His “ministers” (Rom. 13:4)
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- 2) Sovereign over His People: The Lord also “stirred up” many of His people to return to Jerusalem to rebuild His House (v. 5). This was a spiritual task that could only be motivated by God’s Spirit. The Lord exercises the same control over governments today, whether they do good or evil

Second Point: A Lesson in Messianic Hope

- 1) Prophecy Fulfilled: Cyrus probably saw himself as a kind of “messiah” for the nations that the Babylonians had subjugated. However, the Lord moved Cyrus so that events would move on to the coming of the true Messiah. For the Christ had to come from Israel and fulfill all the laws connected with the Temple worship there
- 2) Restoration Incomplete: But the glory of the re-constituted Israel was never as it once had been – or as the prophets said it would be again (Hag. 2:6-9). The Temple was never as glorious, the ark was gone, many of the tribes were poorly represented and the Davidic monarchy would never sit on the throne in Israel again. Those deficiencies showed that a greater fulfillment awaited – in Christ and His heavenly Kingdom

Third Point: A Lesson in Church/World Relations

- 1) A New Exodus: The return of the Exiles is also about the church going out from the world. To make this point, Ezra puts it in terms of a new Exodus, by using words like “go up” (vss. 3,5), emphasizing the building of God’s House (parallel to the Tabernacle in Exodus); and by mentioning the gifts given by others to support their “exodus” (Ex. 12:36). Israel had to “come out from their midst” as they did from Egypt – for both Babylon and Egypt represent the world, as Revelation makes clear. See 2 Cor. 6:17/Is. 52:11 for a similar command to Christians
- 2) Those Who Stayed: Those who remained behind were actually covenant-breakers, who cared more about the world than about the Presence of God, His people and the Promised Land. Staying in Babylon was especially dangerous because God had not yet given His Spirit in fullness to guard His people
- 3) The Pentecost Reversal: Once Christ completed His work, the Spirit was poured out and the Bible completed, God’s people could be sent out into the world with all the help we need to be “in but not of” the world. The Great Commission was made possible by Israel departing from Babylon. We undermine that Commission if we get things back to front, becoming “of” the world while going away from our witness to Christ

Conclusion

