

The Resources to Rebuild

General Topic: Liberating Passover

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Lesson Text: Ezra 1:1-8, 11; 2:64-70

Background Scripture: Ezra 1; 2:64-70

Ezra 1:1 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, that he made a

proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the

earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

3 Who is there among you of all his people? 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 the God,) which is in

Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with

silver; and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of

God that is in Jerusalem.

5 Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with

all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

6 And all they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver; with gold, with

goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all that was willingly offered.

7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had

brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;

8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer; and

numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.

Ezra 1:11 All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did

Sheshbazzar bring up with them of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

Ezra 2:64 The whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and

threescore,

65 Beside their servants and their maids, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred thirty

and seven: and there were among them two hundred singing men and singing women.

66 Their horses were seven hundred thirty and six; their mules, two hundred forty and five;

67 Their camels, four hundred thirty and five; their asses, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

68 And some of the chief of the fathers, when they came to the house of the Lord which is at

Jerusalem, offered freely for the house of God to set it up in his place:

69 They gave after their ability unto the treasure of the work threescore and one thousand drams of

gold, and five thousand pound of silver, and one hundred priests' garments.

70 So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the

Nethinims, dwelt in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

Lesson Objective(s):

By the end of this lesson, we will examine the rebuilding plan for the temple in Jerusalem that God gave to King Cyrus, and we will find trust that God provides resources for the tasks He asks us to do

Teaching Tools:

Word puzzles may be developed from the following site: www.puzzlemaker.com. Also, www.dtlk.com has several visual aids that may be beneficial, as well as www.kidsundayschool.com which provide other helps for teaching.

Bible Journaling may be an interesting way to involve older teens in self-expression of the lessons they are taught. Visit www.lifeway.com/Articles/how-to-start-bible-journaling-in-six-easy-steps to find ways to use this valuable tool to learn and reinforce Scripture.

The Lesson:

Throughout the Bible, there are countless stories of individuals that most would deem as unqualified to be used by God. People tend to measure one's lack of credentials based on their reputation or beliefs. Fortunately, human incapability is not an issue for an all-powerful, and sovereign God. In today's lesson, we will

learn how God used an unlikely resource to be the liberating force for his people.

Background

After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, which was now part of the Persian Empire, God's people were permitted to return to their homeland. Some 300 years before the Babylonian Captivity, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah declaring that God would cause Cyrus, the king of Persia to give the Jewish exiles the opportunity to return to their homeland (Isaiah 44:28). Isaiah's prophecy was now being fulfilled.

The Children of Israel had experienced a period of sheer rebellion against God. Because God is merciful, He sent His prophets to speak to them concerning their ways, but "they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy" (2 Chronicles 36:16). As a result, the young, old, male, female, rich, and poor were led into captivity. Many died in Nebuchadnezzar's attacks, and those who lived were taken away to Babylon where they were servants to Nebuchadnezzar and to Belshazzar after him. Ezra 1 begins with God fulfilling His promise to return His people to the land of promise after 70 years of exile. Some call this Israel's second exodus.

Prediction Sustained (Ezra 1:1-4)

For many years the Children of Israel had been in captivity while their land laid in waste. But deep in the mind of the Israelites was the promise of God from his prophets. Before the fall of Judah, the prophet Jeremiah predicted that Judah would be taken into Babylonian captivity and the land would remain desolate for 70 years. After 70 years God would punish the Babylonians for their cruelty and sinfulness (Jeremiah 25:12). The prophet further predicted that at that time He would cause the Jews to return to Judah (29:10).

The 70-year captivity began with the first of the Jews taken into captivity in 605 BC during the reign of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:1; Daniel 1:1). The period ended when the captives began their return in 538 BC, approximately 70 years later. Note Ezra's careful wording. The message is the word of the Lord, even though it came through Jeremiah's mouth. When the prophets spoke, they were only passing on God's message. Confirmation of this promise only deepens our trust that God will do just what He says.

Preparation Set in Motion (Ezra 1:5-8, 11)

As the Jews prepared to begin their journey home, they were led by the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin. These were the heads or patriarchs of the extended families from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. These two tribes made up the southern kingdom of Judah and were specifically exiled by the Babylonians (2 Kings 24:2). Also returning were the priests and the Levites. Their service would be required once the temple was restored upon their return (Ezra 8:15-17, 24-30). Additionally, among this group returning to Jerusalem were "all of them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." God's sovereign power generated both the king's decree and the people's response. The same God who had raised up the spirit of Cyrus to proclaim this liberty also raised up His people's spirits to take advantage of it. Whatever good we do, we owe it solely to the grace of God.

We can be sure that the temptation was strong for some of them to stay in Babylon due to not all the Jews returning at this time. They probably had convenient settlements there and had an agreeable acquaintance with the neighbors. People often end up finding comfort in their captivity. The discouragements of their return were many and great. The journey was long, their wives and children were probably not fit for travelling; their own land was a strange land, to them and the road to it was

unknown. Jerusalem was in ruins, and in the midst of enemies to whom they would be an easy prey. Because of this, many stayed in Babylon, at least they didn't go with the first group.

But there were some who got over these difficulties. God, by His Spirit and grace filled them with the will to be free, a love for their own land, and a longing for the free and public exercise of their religion. It may be that if God had left them to themselves, and to the counsels of men, they would have remained in Babylon. But He put it into their hearts to set their faces toward Zion. They were a new generation who had never been to Judah, so they went out like their father Abraham from the land of the Chaldees, not knowing where they were going.

Just as the king had commanded, everyone who was around the Jews, encouraged them by supplying articles of silver, gold, goods, cattle," and valuable things given as a freewill offering. God can, wherever he pleases, incline the hearts of strangers to be kind to his people, and make those to strengthen their hands that have weakened.

We are told that When "Cyrus the king" conquered Babylon, he took over the treasury of the Babylonians which included the vessels of the house of the Lord. God made sure the vessels were not lost, melted down, or mixed with other vessels so they could not be identified. Likewise, God takes care of His living vessels of whom it is said "The Lord knows them that are his" (2 Timothy 2:19).

People Set Free (Ezra 2:64-70)

Ezra's precise history writing is on display in the exact numbers recorded here. A total of 42,360 Israelites compose the huge caravan. They require hundreds of all kinds of pack animals. Ezra is not interested in giving a

detailed travel log of their journey. The destination is the only focus: Jerusalem and the Temple of God.

As soon as they arrived, the returning exiles rejoiced by giving gifts toward the construction of the Temple. All gave something, not trying to one-up each other to show off how much they could give but giving as they could. After these gifts were given, they could settle into their ancestral lands. The Jewish nation managed to retain its identity through the exile. Therefore, they knew which lands God had appointed to which tribe. There was no need to fight and bicker over where anyone would live.

Final Thoughts

In this week's lesson, we see how God used Cyrus, the king of Persia to fulfill a decades old prophecy. Isaiah predicted that Cyrus, under God's direction, would allow the Jewish people to return to their own land and worship God. Because He is sovereign, God can use anyone He wants to accomplish His will—and He normally does!

There are people in our society who have been cast aside because of some unfortunate event in their lives. Their possessions may even have been taken away from them as well. The individual may have placed himself or herself in a position that caused these misfortunes to occur. But when God shows mercy, we must show mercy and lend a helping hand and strengthen these individuals to stand on their own two feet again.

Whether it be the bondage of sin, financial debt, or a number of other captors, we should be encouraged that in due time God will always find a way to liberate is people. He will give them the resources needed to rebuild and whom the Son sets free is free indeed! (John 8:36)

Be Salt! Be Light! Be Blessed!