

THE RETURN OF THE JEWS AND THE TEMPLE REBUILDING BEGUN

BIBLE TEXT : Ezra 1:1-11; 3:1-13

LESSON 426 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "All the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid" (Ezra 3:11).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Ezra 1:1-11

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

Bible References:

I Proclamation of Cyrus

1. The spirit of Cyrus was stirred by the Lord, Ezra 1:1;

2 Chronicles 36:22

²² Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD *spoken* by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, 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. Cyrus felt God's command to build the Temple in Jerusalem, Ezra 1:2;

2 Chronicles 36:23

²³ Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah. Who *is there* among you of all his people? The LORD his God *be* with him, and let him go up.

Isaiah 44:28

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.

3. Leave was given to all Jews, who so desired, to return to Jerusalem, Ezra 1:3, 4.

II The Return of the Jews

1. The chief of the fathers, the priests, and the Levites, were among those who returned, Ezra 1:5;

Ezra 2:64

⁶⁴ The whole congregation together *was* forty and two thousand three hundred *and* threescore,

Ezra 2:65

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.

2. They did not go empty-handed, Ezra 1:6.

3. The sacred vessels of the Temple were returned by Cyrus, Ezra 1:7-11.

III Renewing the Altar and Foundation

1. The altar was set up and offerings made thereon, Ezra 3:1-3, 5, 6.

2. The Feast of Tabernacles was observed, Ezra 3:4.

3. Preparations were made and the foundation of the Temple was laid, Ezra 3:7-10.

4. The young men shouted and the old men wept when the foundation was completed, Ezra 3:11-13.

Notes:

Through the inspiration of the Spirit of God, Isaiah the Prophet foretold 150 years before Cyrus was born that God would raise up Cyrus as His "shepherd" -- even mentioning him by name -- to bring about the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the laying of the foundation for the new Temple (**Isaiah 44:28** 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.).

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.

⁹ And this *is* the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives,

¹⁰ Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second *sort* four hundred and ten, *and* other vessels a thousand.

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 3:1-13

¹ And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

² Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as *it is* written in the law of Moses the man of God.

³ And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear *was* upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, *even* burnt offerings morning and evening.

⁴ They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as *it is* written, and *offered* the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;

⁵ And afterward *offered* the

This prophecy was literally fulfilled. Cyrus came into power and gained possession of the nations through the help of God, in order that the will of God concerning His people might be carried out. One of the last kingdoms delivered into Cyrus's hands was Babylon, and shortly thereafter he issued an edict for the return of the Jews and the rebuilding of the Temple. Thus the Babylonian captivity was ended in just seventy years, fulfilling another Scripture, the prophecy of Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 29:10** ¹⁰ For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.).

The Lord's Time

When Cyrus took over the government at Babylon, Daniel was still among the inhabitants of that part of the country (**Daniel 6:28** ²⁸ So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.). Daniel held a position of high authority under King Darius, so without doubt the new king heard about and soon had contact with Daniel. It is believed by many that Daniel, knowing that the seventy years of the Children of Israel's captivity were coming to a close, brought to the attention of King Cyrus the Word that the God of Israel had spoken approximately 150 years before, foretelling the deeds that Cyrus would perform.

One thing is sure: it was the Lord's time, and Cyrus moved very quickly to bring about the Lord's edict. God said of Cyrus: "I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me" (Isaiah 45:4). It is commendable when men and women do the will of God, but it is eternally profitable when the obedience springs from the heart of one who has been truly born again. Some men, as Cyrus on this occasion, do the will of God when it is momentarily convenient; but the true child of God obeys Him at all times, regardless of whether it is convenient.

Proclamation of Liberty

The substance of the proclamation was that the people of God who desired to do so were free to return to Jerusalem to help rebuild the Temple. No one was required to go; however, one would think that this news would be received with great gladness and jubilation by all the Jewish people. After seventy years of exile from their native land would not all the people desire to return home as soon as possible? About 50,000 people were stirred to the point of action and returned to Jerusalem. This was but a fraction of the Jewish people living in Babylonia at the time. Why did not the other Jews desire to return?

After seventy years perhaps the pangs of homesickness had worn off. Many of the older ones would have died, and the younger ones born in the land were not deeply concerned. Many of the people had built homes, had planted fields and vineyards, and in other ways had become accustomed to the land of Babylon. They were comfortably settled now. Why should they remove and face the hardships of a land that had been desolated? They were secure in Babylon; why should they expose themselves to the enemies that had moved into their former homeland? Many felt it was not worth the effort; thus they stayed with their worldly possessions in Babylon.

But there were those who had a burden in their hearts to uphold the name of the Lord, His honour, and His cause. Some could not contain the sorrow nor hold back the tears when they knew of the affliction, reproach, and desolation in Jerusalem (**Nehemiah 1:4** ⁴ And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned *certain* days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.). No offering nor sacrifice

continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

⁶ From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not *yet* laid.

⁷ They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

⁸ Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

⁹ Then stood Jeshua *with* his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites.

¹⁰ And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

¹¹ And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *he* is good, for his mercy *endureth* for

could be made by the Jews in Babylon. The only acceptable sacrifice could be made in Jerusalem, the city chosen by the Lord; so some were eager to return to their homeland, to be once more in the place of God's choosing.

No Change

Men have not changed through the passing years. Even in our day the open doors of spiritual opportunity are too often left unentered because people love their ease too well. People are willing to do the thing that costs them little or nothing (whether the cost be money or time or labour); but that which costs nothing is usually worth nothing. The commendation of God and eternal rewards will be given to the faithful, to those who have been busy in the Lord's service. (**Matthew 25:21** ²¹ His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. **Matthew 25:34-36** ³⁴ Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ³⁵ For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: ³⁶ Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.) Let us not be content to dwell on the low plains of temporal convenience and comfort when the higher ground of opportunities to do God's service is calling to action, though it may require the deprivation of some earthly luxuries and ease.

Strengthened Hands

In addition to releasing the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem, Cyrus's proclamation included the command that the Jews *who* remained in Babylon, and all the people of the land were to help the pilgrims with a freewill offering. God had wrought wondrously for the Jews on different occasions during their captivity, so without doubt they were respected by many of the people of the land. "All they that were about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things."

Cyrus added a great contribution: "The king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD." Nebuchadnezzar had brought those sacred vessels from the Temple in Jerusalem and had placed them in the house of his gods. King Belshazzar had desecrated those vessels, but God preserved them. Without God's protection those vessels would have been melted down and made into other things; but when the Jewish people were ready to return to their homeland, the vessels were delivered to, and came along with, those who were marching to Zion.

True Christians are chosen vessels unto the Lord, even vessels of mercy. The Lord has a use and place for each consecrated vessel to fill, watching over and guarding that vessel from destruction. The devil would love to "melt down" God's vessels and change them into another use, but God protects His vessels, even though they may be as exiles in a foreign land. Some of these days (it may be soon) the Lord will bring all His chosen, consecrated vessels into His House, into the place that He has prepared (**John 14:3** ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also.). Are you ready for that day?

Picking up the Pieces

Consider how fast these people moved! The proclamation of release came early in the first year of Cyrus's reign over Babylon. The people, to the number of 42,360, put their business affairs in order and prepared to depart from Babylon. Jerusalem lay in the distance about 500 miles in a straight line; but the people had to travel a circuitous route, for a great desert lay between the two

ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

¹² But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

¹³ So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

QUESTIONS

1. When did Cyrus give the proclamation of release to the Jews?
2. For what purpose were the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem?
3. How was the pilgrimage financed?
4. How many Jews returned to Jerusalem on the first journey?
5. What great treasure was restored to the Jews to take to the Temple?
6. Why was the altar restored before the other work was started?
7. In what month was the work on the foundation of the Temple set forward?
8. How did the people react when the foundation of the Temple was laid?

What was the reaction of the ancient men?

points. There was no airlift nor modern transportation. Many of the people had to travel on foot; still, by the seventh month the Children of Israel were dwelling in their own cities and were ready to gather as one man to Jerusalem. They had travelled fast enough to allow themselves time to furnish habitations for their families to dwell in during the time the altar and Temple were being built. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

The first action of the people as they gathered themselves as one man to Jerusalem was to build the altar of God. They dug away the rubble and set up the altar on its original bases, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the Law of Moses. The people who occupied the land after the Children of Israel had been taken captive were jealous of the return of the Jews and were not completely friendly. The Jews feared for their safety, therefore the setting up of the altar and the offering of burnt sacrifices were the first order of business. The altar with its sacrifices and the approbation of God upon the people were greater security for Israel from her enemies than a wall of stone around the city.

We have the similar thought for us today: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). What is included in "all these things"? Jesus had been talking about food, drink, and raiment -- the necessities of life. These things are added when we seek first the Kingdom of God, and **His** righteousness.

Foundation

As soon as the altar was again in daily usage and the Feast of Tabernacles had been observed, the rulers of the people commissioned the masons and carpenters to prepare the material for the foundation of the Temple. Meat and drink and oil were sent to the people of Zidon and Tyre in exchange for cedar trees from Lebanon. All this preparation required time, but in the second year of their return, in the second month, the actual work of assembling the foundation was set forward. "When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout."

What a stirring moment that must have been for those people! And how careful they were to do everything according to the Word of God. How the blessing of God rained down upon them. The young men gave voice to their deep feelings with a great shout. The old men, remembering the former Temple and all its glory, could but weep.

Still another Temple is being built in our day, a spiritual Temple: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22). Each can have a part and lot in this Temple, which is being built for eternity. If the Jews were particular to build the temporal Temple according to the Word of God, how much more should we be particular and specific to build our eternal Temple according to His instructions.