

# God Keeps His Word • Ezra 1:1-8

## INTRO • Read Psalm 121 • New Book – Ezra

1. Since we've completed our study in 2 Cor, we return to the OT to look at 3 books; Ezra, Neh, & Esther, because they all deal with the same period of history.
2. In 609 BC, Babylon forced the Kingdom of Judah into submission, taking its most influential citizens back to Babylon as hostages.
  - a. After several yrs Judah rebelled.
  - b. So the Babylonians *returned*, destroyed Jrz, laid waste to the land, & took the entire population into captivity.
  - c. For 70 yrs Judah & Jerusalem lay waste // Then Babylon was conquered by the Persians.
  - d. Their King Cyrus allowed the Jewish exiles to return and rebuild.
3. Ezra tells the story of their return.

### **<sup>1</sup> Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia,**

1. This isn't Cyrus' first year *as king*.
2. It's the first year of his conquest of the City of Babylon he made the western capital of the emerging Persian Empire.

### **<sup>1</sup> Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled,**

1. A century before all this, the prophet Jeremiah foretold Judah's defeat & exile at the hands of the Babylonians.
2. It was all God's judgment for their long rebellion against Him.
  - a. God repeatedly warned them **not** to worship idols.
  - b. But generation after generation ignored the prophets He sent, growing ever more arrogant & wicked.
  - c. They tired of being the people of God and ignored His commands.
  - d. One of which was to allow the land to rest every 7<sup>th</sup> year.
  - e. For 490 yrs they **failed** to keep the sabbath year.
  - f. So **twice**, Jeremiah announced their exile would last **70 yrs** to repay the land what it was owed.<sup>1</sup>
  - g. He also foretold Babylon's **defeat** by **another empire** that would allow the Jews to return.
3. Ezra who wrote this was a priest & scribe. His job was to make new scrolls of God's Word.
4. So he was *well aware* of Jeremiah's prophecy.
5. When Cyrus issued his decree allowing the Jews to return, Ezra knew it was the fulfillment of God's Promise.
6. The 70 yrs of exile Jeremiah foretold *was up*. Since God's Word **CANNOT** fail, we read ... →

**the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, <sup>2</sup> Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which *is* in Judah. <sup>3</sup> Who *is* among you of all His people? May 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* God), which *is* in Jerusalem. <sup>4</sup> And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which *is* in Jerusalem.**

<sup>1</sup> Jer 25:11-14; 29:10

1. God stirred Cyrus to make this proclamation *because* → **God's Word cannot fail.**
2. That why in v1, Ezra says, "**That** the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled," God moved Cyrus.
3. *How* God moved him, we're not told. But we can venture a guess.
4. Jeremiah lived a century before Cyrus. The prophet Isaiah lived a century before Jeremiah.
  - a. He not only foretold Judah's return, he **named** the king who'd issue the proclamation.

**<sup>44:24</sup> Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, . . . [I] say of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, & he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," & to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."'**

- b. A few vs later, Isaiah again names Cyrus, saying he'd conquer many nations, which history says he did.<sup>2</sup>
  - c. Yet Isaiah lived some 200 years before Cyrus.

---

5. The prophet Daniel was a respected advisor in the Persian court.
  - a. He knew Isaiah's prophecies and in all likelihood showed Cyrus his name in Isaiah's scroll.
  - b. The wording of Cyrus' proclamation is provocative.
  - c. It breaks with the tradition used in this kind of announcement.
    - 1) The gods of Persia were to be honored above all others.
    - 2) It was they, after all, who'd given Cyrus victory over others.
    - 3) Remember that in ancient warfare, it was whoever's god was stronger who prevailed.
  - d. But in *this* proclamation, Cyrus says it's *Yahweh*, the God of Israel, Who'd given him victory.
  - e. In v3, Cyrus even adds a little remark so everyone knows he regards Yahweh as the real God.
6. That Daniel showed Cyrus Isaiah's prophecy is made clear in v2 when Cyrus says >>

**[Yahweh] has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which *is* in Judah.**

7. Cyrus then authorizes all who want to return get ready and go.
8. He instructs those who stayed in Babylon to fund those returning to rebuild.

**<sup>5</sup> Then the heads [leaders] of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And all those who *were* around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all *that* was willingly offered.**

1. right around 50K made this return.
2. Many times more Jews *remained* in Babylon where after 70 yrs they'd settled down & made new lives for themselves.
3. They were doing well & were happy to support those returning to Judah to make a fresh start.

**<sup>7</sup> King Cyrus also brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods; <sup>8</sup> and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.**

1. Sheshbazzar was the Babylonian name of *Zerubbabel*, the heir to the royal line of King David.
2. Though he was by rights the *king* of Judah, that wasn't an office the Persians could allow.
3. So Zerubbabel was appointed as Judah's governor. He led this return.

---

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 45:1

## The King's Heart

1. This passage has much to teach us about **our** lives & time.
2. Two radically different ideologies campaigned for the vote of the American people in November.
3. Last Wed, a new administration representing one of them entered office.
4. Now there's a movement under way to *disenfranchise* the other; to *un-person* all those who hold it.
5. Time will tell what impact the new administration has on our country and the world.
6. What **we, believers, followers of Jesus**, must do, is keep our eyes fixed on **heaven**, not **Washington DC**.
  - a. Our hearts are set on the throne room **up there**, not the Oval Office **over there**.
  - b. My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.  
On Christ the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.

---

7. This passage ought to be of great encouragement to us.
  - a. We find a powerful pagan king God moved to accomplish His will.
  - b. The 70 yrs of exile foretold by Jeremiah were at an end, so God *stirred* Cyrus to make a proclamation allowing the Jews to return.
  - c. He even gave them resources to rebuild.
8. And **all** so that >> The Word of the Lord would be fulfilled.
9. God had spoken, so it could not, **NOT** have happened!

---

10. In Pro 21:1 we find an amazing promise –

**The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD. Like the rivers of water, He turns it wherever He wishes.**

1. This is a mystery. I do not understand it.
  - a. God gives us the power to choose & honors the choices we make.
  - b. Having bestowed free-will, He doesn't **force** His will upon us.
  - c. Yet because He IS God, He's utterly free & sovereign, so that *our* choices **never force Him either**.
  - d. Because God is all-powerful, all-knowing, & being eternal knows the end from the beginning, He's able to move all things forward according to His perfect will *without* violating ours.
2. Cyrus was free, yet God's Word said he would send the Jews back to rebuild.
  - a. Without violating Cyrus' will, God's Spirit worked on him **in such a way that he chose** to issue the proclamation.
  - b. As the Proverb said, Cyrus' heart was in God's hand.
3. I've always found that Proverb fascinating because God likens the king's heart to a river.
  - a. It's a **wonderful** analogy.
  - b. It's the nature of a river *to flow*; that water is going **somewhere**.
  - c. Ultimately, it's going to the sea. That's its destiny.
  - d. But the *route* it takes to get there isn't determined *by the river*; it's determined *by the terrain*.
  - e. The river is going flow, but its route is determined by factors *beyond its control*.

---

4. God has a plan for history. It's outlined by the prophets & prophecy.
  - a. The future is set, the end is already written.
  - b. Time has a destiny, a final sea it will empty into.
  - c. Here we are, somewhere in the hills moving toward the future's horizon.
  - d. We make our choices freely, but the course we ultimately take is determined by factors beyond our control.
  - e. Though we are indeed free, **God is freer yet**.

f. His Kingdom WILL come, His will, WILL BE DONE on Earth as it is in Heaven.

g. And. It. Is. GLORIOUS!!!!

---

5. We **must** hold on to this truth. // We dare not fret or fear because of who occupies a White House.
  6. Such fear as that is unbelief.
  7. If God can stir the Persian king to fulfill His Word, can He not move an American President & Congress?
  8. God's plan *will* not, it *can* not be thwarted by a guy at a desk with a pen and a phone.
  9. God is in control & His Word **will** be fulfilled.
- 

## CONCLUSION

1. As we end, take note of 2 things.

### First

1. In 1 Tim 2, the Apostle Paul calls us to pray for those in authority.

**<sup>1</sup> I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. <sup>3</sup> For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**

2. We're to pray for our civil leaders at every level, especially the President.
3. His heart is in God's hand. It seems God's hand moves to answer our prayers when they align with His will.
4. So we pray, "Your kingdom come & Your will be done in the Oval Office, in the Halls of Congress, in Sacramento, in City Hall, as it is in heaven."
  - a. **Your** prayers **do** make a difference!
  - b. They're part of **HOW** God directs the choices of rulers to accomplish **His** will.

### Second

1. Notice how Ezra filtered current events through the lens of Scripture. v1 >>

**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, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom.**

2. If there was a *Babylonian Herald Tribune* it would have carried the headline, "*King Cyrus Issues Proclamation Mandating Return of Jews to Homeland.*"
3. But Ezra knew what was *really happening* was that everything was playing out as God had said.
4. He'd know God's Word & understood events *in light of them*.
5. Because he did, he was positioned to live in light of them.
6. What was true then, is just as true now.
7. God is at work in the world. → Let's prayerfully discern where & be a part of it.