

## **Are You Ready To Go Home?**

### **Ezra**

#### **What Does The Bible Say?**

28 When I say of Cyrus, ‘He is my shepherd,’

he will certainly do as I say.

He will command, ‘Rebuild Jerusalem’;

he will say, ‘Restore the Temple.’ ” (Isaiah 44:28 NLT)

**The prophet Isaiah prophesied about 160 years before this event.**

#### **What Does The Bible Say?**

12 “Then, after the seventy years of captivity are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his people for their sins,” says

the Lord. “I will make the country of the Babylonians a

wasteland forever. (Jeremiah 25:12 NLT)

10 This is what the Lord says: “You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again.

(Jeremiah 29:10 NLT)

**Daniel was taken into exile to Babylon in 605 BC, and in 539 BC Daniel was studying Jeremiah and received significant revelations about Israel’s future in Daniel Chapter Nine.**

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the Lord fulfilled the prophecy he had given through Jeremiah. He stirred the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom: 2 “This is what King Cyrus of Persia says:

“The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Any of you who are his people may go to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the Lord,

the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you! (Ezra 1:1–3 NLT)

### **God Controls all political powers.**

1 The king's heart is like a stream of water directed by the Lord; he guides it wherever he pleases. (Proverbs 21:1 NLT)

### **What Does The Bible Say?**

Here is the list of the Jewish exiles of the provinces who returned from their captivity. King Nebuchadnezzar had deported them to Babylon, but now they returned to Jerusalem and the other towns in Judah where they originally lived. (Ezra 2:1 NLT)

**It was their sin that took them into captivity, but it was God's grace that was taking them home.**

**It is no different with us. It is God's grace that saves us, it is nothing we do.**

2 Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. (Ezra 2:2 NLT)

**Have you why all the lists in the Bible are there, giving so many names otherwise long forgotten and so difficult to read aloud in church?**

**In Heaven, there is a lists too, and your name better be on it.**

27 Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

(Revelation 21:27)

<sup>59</sup> Another group returned at this time from the towns of Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Kerub, Addan, and Immer. However, they could not prove that they or their families were descendants of Israel. <sup>60</sup> This group included the families of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—a total of 652 people. (Ezra 2:59–60 NLT)

## **How Can We Obey**

The apostle Peter said Acts 2:38–39

Repent of your Sins

Turn to God

Be baptized

<sup>42</sup> All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

Tyndale House Publishers, [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), Ac 2:42.

### **Additional Notes:**

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at [www.crosswaveschurch.com/host](http://www.crosswaveschurch.com/host). Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

### **Explore:**

### **KEY TRUTHS:**

- 1. God Is Sovereign Over the World and Its Rulers and Keeps His Promises (Jeremiah 25:1-13; Ezra 1:1-3)**

## **2. God Restores His People and Gives Them What They Need to Do His Will (Ezra 1:4—2:1, 64-70)**

### **HOW IT FITS: Where This Lesson Fits in the Story of the**

**Bible:** The book of Ezra chronicles the return of God's people from Babylonian captivity to the Promised Land from 538 BC to 457 BC.

### **Explore:**

In the Book of Ezra we see that God is sovereign and has the power to direct the hearts and actions of all people when necessary, including the most powerful rulers, so that His will and promises come to pass.

**God Is Sovereign Over the World and Keeps His Promises  
(Jeremiah 25:1-13; Ezra 1:1-3)**

Despite warnings God sent through Jeremiah (and other prophets), God's people had fallen away from God into idolatry and sin and refused to turn back to the Lord (Jeremiah 25:1-7. See also 2 Chronicles 36:1-16). Just as He had promised in passages such as Leviticus 26:14-39, God had allowed His people to fall into the hands of their enemies.

Jeremiah warned that God would use the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar to overtake Jerusalem, destroy the Temple of God, and take most of God's people from the Promised Land into captivity in Babylon. The land would be laid waste and sorrow would overcome the people (Jeremiah 25:8-11. See also 2 Chronicles 36:17-21). The Assyrians, who conquered the northern tribes of Israel, would relocate and intermingle the people they conquered to remove national identity. But the Babylonians deported the captives of Jerusalem to Babylon where they lived in their own communities, maintained their own heritage, and developed synagogues to preserve their faith.



Ezekiel 5 outlines God's judgment, foretelling that a third of the people would die by pestilence and famine, a third would die by the sword, and a third would be scattered to the wind. Only a remnant would be spared (Ezekiel 5:1-3).

God's promises, however, did not end with judgment. He also promised to remember His covenant with His people if they humbled themselves, confessed their sin, and repented. The prophet Jeremiah said their exile would last 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11-13; 29:10), then there would be restoration (Jeremiah 29:10-14; 32:36-38). God's people would remain in Babylonian captivity for 70 years and then God would punish the Babylonians for their own sins (Jeremiah 25:11-13).

God's people would be punished for 70 years. This would be difficult to endure, but the hardship would not last forever. Also, the prophecy foretold the punishment of Babylon. This was a promise from God that the enemies of the Jewish people would

be cursed (fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant). Chapters 50 and 51 of Jeremiah contain specific prophecies about Babylon. These prophecies from God's prophet became historical events.

We also read in the book of Ezra that the prophets Haggai and Zechariah helped lead the people into a renewed relationship with the Lord. Just as Judah's destruction happened in waves, so did their return. Ezra reports the first and second return of exiles and this separates the book into two time periods.

As we begin reading Ezra 1, the Babylonian Empire had been defeated and the Persian Empire had taken over. The leader of the Persians was King Cyrus. This non-believing king would be used by the Lord to restore the people to the land and to supply resources to rebuild the Temple. He would also return the items taken from the Temple when the Babylonians conquered Israel.

We see God's sovereignty over nations and rulers displayed as Ezra 1:1 says that God stirred Cyrus' spirit to make a

proclamation for all of his kingdom and put it in writing. This took place in the first year of Cyrus' reign over Judah. His proclamation specifically said the Lord appointed him to build a Temple in Jerusalem. Any Jews were free to go back to Judah and rebuild the Temple. This proclamation led to the fulfillment of God's promise through Jeremiah to return His people to the land after 70 years captivity (Jeremiah 29:10). God's Word and promises are completely reliable.

Cyrus' declaration led to much restoration for God's people. Cyrus first mentioned the restoration of the Temple (Ezra 1:2). All readers of the Bible know how important the Temple was to the Jewish people. It is shocking to read of its destruction in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36. But here we see a plan for the restoration of the House of God. It was symbolic of the presence of God and was the place where His people brought offerings.

There was also a restoration of the land by the return of the Jewish people (Ezra 1:3). For decades they had been exiled by the King of Babylon. Now the King of Persia was releasing them. They could go home to the land God had promised them.

### **Explore:**

Of the many prophecies of Jeremiah, here are a few that were fulfilled in the small book of Ezra: The 70-year captivity of Judah in Babylon (25:11- 12; 29:10); the restoration of Jerusalem after 70 years (32:36-38); the defeat of Babylon after the seventy years (25:12-14); that Babylon would treat the good exiles kindly (24:1-7); the regathering of the Jewish people (30:3, 10; 31:8-12; the rebuilding of the land of Israel (30:18-21; 31:38- 39; 33:7-9).

## **Explore:**

### **God Restores His People and Gives Them What They Need to Do His Will**

**(Ezra 1:4—2:1, 64-70)**

God not only stirred Cyrus to grant freedom to the captives (Ezra 1:1), but He also stirred the hearts of the Jews to give them the desire to return to Judah and rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1:5).

By the grace of God, a portion of the Jews returned safely to Jerusalem and Judah. The journey from Babylon to Jerusalem would have taken the people several months to complete (about 900 miles). God protected them during their travels and ensured they arrived back home.

On top of that, King Cyrus' proclamation instructed the Israelites' neighbors to help them with finances, supplies, livestock, and offerings for the trip and the Temple (Ezra 1:4, 6). He also commanded that the Temple articles that King Nebuchadnezzar had looted decades before be returned to

Jerusalem (Ezra 1:7-8). A detailed list was made of all the items they returned to God's Temple (Ezra 1:9-11). Cyrus made Sheshbazzar the governor of Judah. Over 5000 items made of gold and silver were returned to Jerusalem.

We see a restoration of blessing and provision in 1:4 as Cyrus ordered all people to give the Israelites silver, gold, goods, livestock, and freewill offerings for the Temple. After decades of exile, God blessed them financially.

Verses 7-11 tell of the restoration of the Temple worship items.

It turned out that what appeared to be looting of the Temple was really God placing the items in safe keeping. In preparation for a restored Temple, a restored priesthood, and a restored system of worship, God provided the thousands of items needed. These weren't just replacements. What the enemy stole, God gave back.

God's plans will not and cannot be thwarted. What God has set out to do, He will do. The beauty of this is that He uses us to

accomplish His work. God positioned and prepared the liberated Jews for the necessary work of rebuilding the Temple by supplying them with Cyrus' blessing and Persian resources. His sovereign and gracious hand had already provided all they needed.

Chapter 2 lists the specific people who returned in this first wave. Over 42,000 Jews returned along with servants (2:64-65). Their livestock returned with them (2:66-67). Not only did God restore them to the land, but they actually returned to their hometowns and villages. Most had been born in exile, but were now able to live where their families had lived (2:70).

At the end of chapter 2 we see a restoration of worship and service. The first thing they did was gather at the site of the original Temple to give freewill offerings (2:68-69). The restoration of worship included the restoration of the priesthood, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, and other Temple servants.

Even though there was no building or gates, God restored the people. That is what He does.

The remaining chapters of Ezra chronicle the people's efforts to rebuild the Temple and altar of worship. They tell of challenges they faced and enemies from the land who sought to discourage the rebuilding of the Temple. Later, King Darius of Persia provided funding and the Temple was completed and dedicated to the Lord. The priests and Levites began their Temple assignments.

Sixty years later, Ezra led a second wave of exiles back to the land (1,500 men and their families). They were sent by Artaxerxes, a new Persian King, who also provided more funding and provisions. Chapter 8 gives specific lists of the families and offerings Ezra brought to Jerusalem. Finally, the sin of intermarriage with pagans who led them away from the Lord was dealt with and the people repented.



## **Explore:**

Many Christians know that the Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language and the New Testament was written in the Greek language. Pastors and teachers will often refer to the meaning of a word or phrase in the original Hebrew or Greek. Some, however, may not know that 268 verses of the Bible were originally written in Aramaic. These are found in Ezra 4:8-6:18, Ezra 7:12-26, Daniel 2:4b-7:28, and Jeremiah 10:11. It was the common language used by people in this part of the world in this time period through about AD 700. This means that Aramaic was the native language of Jesus and the 12 disciples. In the New Testament, there are a few occasions when the original Aramaic has been preserved for Bible readers today. The most familiar is the cry of Jesus from the cross in Mark 15:34, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” Even though Christ was quoting Psalm

22:1 (which was written in Hebrew), He cried out in Aramaic, the common language of the day. We see Aramaic used in Ezra 4:8-6:18 because it was the common language known by the Jews and the Persians. Some Bible translations may refer to the Aramaic language as Syrian (2 Kings 18:26, Ezra 4:7, Isaiah 36:11, and Daniel 2:4). Thankfully, you and I have the Bible in our language and don't have to learn Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic in order to read His Word. For more information, see [bit.ly/Aramaic TruthOnly](http://bit.ly/AramaicTruthOnly).

### **Explore:**

Christianity is about more than going to church and living a good moral life. Being a Christian is about having a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School teacher or Bible study leader should want to see each of his or her learners enter into this relationship—their eternal destiny

depends on it. As you work toward this goal, keep the following in mind:

Following Christ is about more than a mere decision; it is about a lifelong relationship. Jesus called us to make disciples, not mere decision-makers. Aim for long-term faith, not momentary emotion.

Salvation is a matter of grace, not works. Our works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor do they keep us (Galatians 3:2-6).

Good works are a product of salvation, not a prerequisite to it.

Don't confuse sanctification with salvation. Holiness follows salvation; it doesn't precede it. Don't try to impose "Christian" expectations on men and women who don't know Christ.

- Keep it simple. Being born again is not complicated. Here's a simple way to explain it:

- Acknowledge your sinfulness and your need for a Savior (Romans 3:10, 23).

- Trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sins and in His resurrection (Romans 10:9-10).

Surrender your life to God's transforming power (Romans 12:1-2).

Most of all, remember that your job is to tell the truth in a way others can understand, answer their questions, and give them an opportunity to respond. If you do that faithfully, some will respond and join the band of Christ-followers. When they do, Heaven will rejoice!

### **Question 1 of 5**

Give an example of a time when God used something or someone unexpected to accomplish His will or glorify Him.

## **Question 2 of 5**

How did the events of Ezra 1:1-3 prove God's Word and promises are reliable?

## **Question 3 of 5**

Do you worry too much about politics? How much do you pray for your political leaders?

## **Question 4 of 5**

How can we help the people we love get to heaven?

## **Question 5 of 5**

Why is it important to confess your sins daily and ask for forgiveness when praying?

