

Beulah Baptist Church – The Reverend Jerry D. Black, Pastor
Sunday School Lesson – March 6, 2022
Reverend Mark Seals - Minister of Christian Education
Brother Michael Moore - Superintendent
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Quarterly Theme: God Frees and Redeems- Unit 1: Liberating Passover

Lesson 1: Babylonian Captivity Ends

Printed Text & Bible Background: EZRA 1:1-8, 11; 2:64-70 Devotional Reading: AMOS 5: 14-15

Aim for Change/Learning Objectives

By the end of the lesson, we will:

1. **EXAMINE** the rebuilding plan for the Temple in Jerusalem that God gave to King Cyrus,
2. **BELIEVE** and **TRUST** that God provides resources for tasks God asks us to do, and
3. **SHARE** situations in which believers will trust God's provision and act in faith.

In-Focus: (Text) - The story highlights how important it is to pray when we are in a rebuilding stage and Believe and Trust God's provision and guidance for any task that God asks of us.

Unifying Principle – **The Resources to Rebuild** – Sometimes people are given a challenging job, which requires a change or risk. Where can we find resources to meet these challenges? Israel's release from Babylonian captivity reveals that we can have faith that God will provide the people and resources to fulfill His purposes.

Key Verse – *“When they arrived at the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, some of the family leaders made voluntary offerings toward the rebuilding of God's Temple on its original site.”* (Ezra 2:68, NLT).

The People, Places, and Times

Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon from 605 to 562 BC-besieges Jerusalem in 597 BC. When he does this, he takes many elites as captives back to Babylon. He sets up a “puppet” king in Jerusalem, who, along with the people, rebels. This forces King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the city and take all inhabitants captive. He took all the valuables in the Temple including the sacred objects. After plundering the temple, he put the sacred objects in the temples in Babylon, his country, to them show off and declare by doing this that his gods were more powerful than the Jewish God.

Cyrus, King of Persia from 559 to 530 BC. King Cyrus captured the city of Babylon from the Babylonian king, Belshazzar. Cyrus would allow the people he conquered to go back to their homelands. This set the stage for the Hebrew people to return to Jerusalem after their captivity. As a result of Cyrus's Persian conquest of Babylonia, the Jews were free to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple! ***Cyrus is remembered in the Old Testament as a heroic figure and messenger of God who redeemed Israel.***

V. Background

The Children of Israel – after totally and completely rebelling against God, He was still merciful and sent prophets to speak to and warn the people, who mocked the prophets and despised God's word. The Lord's wrath arose against his people “until there was no remedy” (**2 Chronicles 36:16**). This is the time and point at which men, women, young, old, rich and poor were led into Babylonian captivity. Many died in the attacks by Nebuchadnezzar or lived and became servants to Belshazzar (v.20) who came after him. After the people have been in captivity or exile, our lesson today, starting with Ezra 1:1, begins with God fulfilling His promise to return his people to their home, the land of promise, after the exile.

The Lesson-at-a-Glance

1. The Revelation of a Stirred Heart (Ezra 1:1)
2. The Proclamation of a Stirred Heart (vv. 2-4)
3. The Response of a Stirred Heart (vv. 5-11)
4. The Gifts of Stirred Hearts (Ezra 2:64-70)

In Depth/With More Light on the Text

1. The Revelation of a Stirred Heart (Ezra 1:1)

It was prophesied that God would punish then deliver (Jeremiah 25:12) His people after a period of bondage. At the appointed time, God began to move to change the situation through the divine spirit. It does not matter how long a person may be held captive by Satan or sinister human machinations, God will change a situation and searches for those whose hearts are malleable (can be controlled, adapted or altered by outside influences) to the **stirring** of God. Here, that person whose spirit was **stirred** for the plight of others was Cyrus. He, in turn, was obedient to the spirit that **stirred** his heart.

2. The Proclamation of a Stirred Heart (vv. 2-4)

God wanted His people and Temple again. He was going to use King Cyrus (an unbeliever) to put things in motion. Thus, Cyrus, in the first year of his reign, **proclaimed (v.2)** that God had given him all the kingdoms of the earth and appointed him to build a Temple in Jerusalem. Cyrus knew that he was not talking about just any god, but the God who is at Jerusalem, the God in heaven. The **proclamation** was also a challenge directed at the people of God. It was a time for rebuilding and refreshing. Cyrus is calling on not just those who claim to belong to God, but those who have faith in God's ability to protect and keep those who step out for God.

3. The Response of a Stirred Heart (vv. 5-11)

The family heads of Judah and Benjamin, with the priests and Levites, **responded** and were preparing to "go up to build the house of the Lord" (v.5). The people needed resources—silver, gold, goods, livestock, and freewill offerings for the house of God. Costly—God made a way. All that the Babylonians had stolen was now returned (vv. 9-10). This inventory of the vessels listed is more about again worshiping God in a space worthy of His glory. Most importantly, it signifies the power of the God of Israel over the gods and kings who laid claim to what belonged to the people of God.

4. The Gifts of Stirred Hearts (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 large caravan. Although they need a lot of resources and animals, Ezra does not intend to give a detailed log of their journey. He keeps his focus on the destination—Jerusalem and the Temple of God. After the exiles arrive in Jerusalem, they give gifts toward the constructions of the Temple. Everybody gave something, with no one trying to show off and give more than another person, but giving what they could. Once the gifts were given, the people who returned from exile settled into their ancestral lands. The Jewish nation did not lose its identity during the exile. The people knew which lands God had appointed to which tribe. They did not have to argue over where they would live.

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why did the Temple need to be rebuilt with so much grandeur when the cost of the materials going to meals for the hungry and homes for the homeless?
2. What does it reveal about God who did not send the captives out empty-handed?

Liberating Lesson

There are people in our society who have been cast aside because of some unfortunate event in their lives. When God shows mercy, we must show mercy and lend a hand. God supplied the Hebrew children in this lesson with resources to get them started again. How can we help someone get started again?

Application for Activation

This week, think of someone who needs your help. What kind of people may have lost their job, house, and possessions due to disobedience to God and His ways? They may be recovering drug addicts, alcoholics, or prisoners. They are trying their best to get back on track. Ask God to show you how you can help right now.

Notes and Questions for Reflection

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