

When ended the last study with Josiah, king of Judah, being killed in battle and then buried in the city of Jerusalem. He had served the Lord and was taken home to be with his God.

But now we come to the last chapter of the book of Chronicles and in a sense the last chapter in the sovereign rule of Judah and Israel. As was promised by God through Jeremiah to Josiah, that God would judge the nation after the death of Josiah, so it will now come to pass.

2 Chronicles 34:23-28 ²³ She said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Tell the man who sent you to Me, ²⁴ thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I am bringing evil on this place and on its inhabitants, *even* all the curses written in the book which they have read in the presence of the king of Judah. ²⁵ "Because they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath will be poured out on this place and it shall not be quenched.'" ²⁶ "But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus you will say to him, 'Thus says the LORD God of Israel *regarding* the words which you have heard, ²⁷ "Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and *because* you humbled yourself before Me, tore your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you," declares the LORD. ²⁸ "Behold, I will gather you to your fathers and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, so your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place and on its inhabitants.'" And they brought back word to the king.

With Josiah's death God begins to carry out His promise.

2 Chronicles 36:1-4 ^{NAU} Then the people of the land took Joahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in place of his father in Jerusalem. ² Joahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. ³ Then the king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem, and imposed on the land a fine of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold. ⁴ The king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. But Neco took Joahaz his brother and brought him to Egypt.

Remember that Neco had defeated Josiah and so at the death of Josiah the people of the land of Judah make his son, Joahaz, the king. But, evidently, Neco doesn't like that choice and so, with his influence and power over Judah he makes the choice he wants, who happens to be the brother of Joahaz, who is Eliakim.

The name of this other brother, Eliakim, means God sets up. But Neco decides to change his name to Jehoiakim which means the Lord raises up.

Why do you suppose Neco changes his name from “God sets up” to “the Lord raises up?”

It may very well be a couple of things. It could be that Neco decides to place his stamp on this person as one who has determined that this is my choice and is therefore God's choice to raise up another person according to Neco's will.

And yet, it could also be God working in such a way, (once again through this pagan king Neco), to show how His word will come to pass to bring down the nation according to His promise to Josiah.

And so, even if Neco is changing Eliakim's name in a way to say that he is in control of the fate of Judah, he is actually being used by God to do according to God's will who is the one raising up this man for Judah's defeat and judgment, whom we're told did evil in the sight of the Lord.

It was during the reign of Jehoiakim that our friend from last week, Nebuchadnezzar, begins to carry out his plan of capturing Judah, which we were told quite clearly by God that he was being used as God's servant to accomplish His judgment on Judah.

So, whose plan was this: God's or Nebuchadnezzar's?

It was certainly God's as He moved the heart of Nebuchadnezzar to carry out those plans. But, Nebuchadnezzar is not some robot. He is going to be held accountable for how he carries out this judgment on Judah to the point where God will in turn judge Nebuchadnezzar for his sin.

It turns out that even though Neco, king of Egypt, has power and authority over Judah, he is not the one who ultimately will determine the fate of Judah as Nebuchadnezzar usurps all authority and takes Jehoiakim into custody.

2 Chronicles 36:5-7 ⁵ Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and he

did evil in the sight of the LORD his God. ⁶ Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against him and bound him with bronze *chains* to take him to Babylon. ⁷ Nebuchadnezzar also brought *some* of the articles of the house of the LORD to Babylon and put them in his temple at Babylon.

With Jehoiakim out of the picture king number 3 in this last chapter comes to power. And I love this one.

2 Chronicles 36:9 ⁹ Jehoiachin was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned three months and ten days in Jerusalem, and he did evil in the sight of the LORD.

I don't know how evil an 8 year old could be but he is recorded in the eternal word of God as being evil in the sight of the Lord and he will be replaced by Nebuchadnezzar for his older brother.

By the way, since Jehoiachin was only 8, being the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar took to Babylon, it may have been a gracious move by Nebuchadnezzar to reunite father with young son. It was also an excuse for Nebuchadnezzar to get more wealth out of the temple in Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 36:10 ¹⁰ At the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon with the valuable articles of the house of the LORD,

But whatever was going on at the time the older son of Jehoiakim now comes to power. This is king number 4 in the last chapter of Chronicles.

2 Chronicles 36:10-17 ¹⁰ At the turn of the year King Nebuchadnezzar sent and brought him to Babylon with the valuable articles of the house of the LORD, and he made his kinsman Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem. ¹¹ Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. ¹² He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the LORD. ¹³ He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear *allegiance* by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel. ¹⁴ Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful *following* all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of the LORD which He had sanctified in Jerusalem. ¹⁵ The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent *word* to them again and again by His messengers,

because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; ¹⁶ but they *continually* mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy. ¹⁷ Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave *them* all into his hand.

What a testament to the depravity of man and his unwillingness to follow after the one true God. Keep in mind that it was only a couple of generations prior to this that Josiah rediscovered the word of God and he humbled himself before the Lord and held one of the largest gatherings in some 700 years as he celebrated the Passover as both Judah and Israel came together to be reminded through the Passover how God delivered His people from the bondage to Egypt.

And by the way, what was this bondage to Egypt actually representing?

Bondage to sin.

Romans 7:14 ¹⁴ For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin.

The bondage that Israel suffered in Egypt was a picture of being in slavery to sin.

Galatians 4:3-7 ³ So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. ⁶ Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

But the greatest picture we have of the children of God coming out from the bondage of Egypt, the bondage of slavery to sin, is the celebration of the Passover and particularly the way in which Jesus Christ celebrated it on the night in which He was betrayed where He made it clear that He was the sacrificial lamb being sacrificed for His people.

Matthew 26:26-28 ²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples,

and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." ²⁷ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

In such a short time from Josiah the people of Judah and Israel had forgotten the significance of the Passover and the way in which the Lord saves His people. And now they turn to other gods and other interests.

And yet, during this entire time it's not as though God is silent on the matter. He is continually confronting Judah with the truth of His word as He uses Jeremiah to warn them of their disobedience.

2 Chronicles 36:12 ¹² He did evil in the sight of the LORD his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke for the LORD.

What was Jeremiah prophesying during this time to Zedekiah?

Jeremiah 21:3-7 ³ Then Jeremiah said to them, "You shall say to Zedekiah as follows: ⁴ Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "Behold, I am about to turn back the weapons of war which are in your hands, with which you are warring against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the wall; and I will gather them into the center of this city. ⁵ "I Myself will war against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm, even in anger and wrath and great indignation. ⁶ "I will also strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast; they will die of a great pestilence. ⁷ "Then afterwards," declares the LORD, "I will give over Zedekiah king of Judah and his servants and the people, even those who survive in this city from the pestilence, the sword and the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their foes and into the hand of those who seek their lives; and he will strike them down with the edge of the sword. He will not spare them nor have pity nor compassion."

Well, if Zedekiah will not humble himself before the Lord God what are the chances of him humbling himself before a man like Nebuchadnezzar?

2 Chronicles 36:13 ¹³ He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear *allegiance* by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the LORD God of Israel.

Notice here how Nebuchadnezzar makes Zedekiah swear allegiance by God, which is a reference to the God of Israel. Why does he do this and not make him swear by the gods of Babylon?

Because Nebuchadnezzar is smart enough to know that Zedekiah will have to publicly acknowledge the God of Israel as his God and will then become accountable to his God for any deviation from the pledge. It would mean little to nothing to have him swear by the gods of Babylon as Nebuchadnezzar is forcing the leaders in Judah, who also acknowledge God, to make sure he toes the line.

But it didn't seem to make much difference as Zedekiah rebels against Nebuchadnezzar and in so doing we're told that he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to the Lord God of Israel.

By the way, in the context of verse 13 the allegiance that Zedekiah agrees to, as he swears by the God of Israel, is to Nebuchadnezzar. So, why then does it say he would not humble himself to the God of Israel?

Because even though the allegiance is to a man, the name of the God of Israel is invoked to seal that allegiance. Again, Nebuchadnezzar knew what he was doing by bringing the God of Israel into the equation.

But it wasn't just Zedekiah who would not humble himself before the Lord, many of the leaders and the entire nation would not either.

2 Chronicles 36:14 ¹⁴ Furthermore, all the officials of the priests and the people were very unfaithful *following* all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of the LORD which He had sanctified in Jerusalem.

But even in their rebellion God continues to show forth His grace and mercy by continuing to warn them of His judgment.

2 Chronicles 36:15-16 ¹⁵ The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent *word* to them again and again by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place; ¹⁶ but they *continually* mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy.

The word remedy here in our text could literally be translated, cure. The only remedy or cure against the wrath of God is to humble oneself before God and accept by faith his only remedy for sin which is to embrace His Messiah, His Savior, who was clearly portrayed in the Passover and the sacrificial system which apparently the leaders in Judah had forgotten.

And since they were unwilling to accept the grace of God the only thing left is His judgment and wrath.

2 Chronicles 36:16-21 ¹⁶ but they *continually* mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, until there was no remedy. ¹⁷ Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave *them* all into his hand. ¹⁸ All the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his officers, he brought *them* all to Babylon. ¹⁹ Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles. ²⁰ Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹ to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.

This is one of the abominations of desolations that we see in Scripture where the house of the Lord is trodden down and the name of the Lord is mocked in the process.

But notice, who has orchestrated this slaughter and this pillaging of the house of God according to verse 17?

There will be a day in which this apostasy and this pillaging of the house of God will be played out for the people of God again, and in fact we are seeing it today. This is what was spoken of by the apostle Paul.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-10 ^{NAU} Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, ² that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. ³ Let

no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. ⁵ Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? ⁶ And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way. ⁸ Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹ *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰ and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.

This apostasy that Paul addresses is an apostasy that is directly tied to the New Testament church. And we know that apostasy is a rejection of the one true faith and teaching of the word of God, not unlike what Zedekiah has done.

Have you ever wondered what Peter was talking about when he said this?

1 Peter 4:17 ¹⁷ For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

What is the judgment with the household of God and why does Peter use this kind of language when could just have easily said judgment with the church, which is what he is addressing?

The household of God is covenant language that addresses the true people of God from both old and new testaments whose faith was that of the faith of Abraham. The temple in O.T. Israel was the focal point to where God resided among His people. Israel was the type or picture of the true people of God from every generation and every nation and tongue of people.

And that temple in Israel was a temporary shadow of the true temple that was prophesied by God. And when that true temple came it made the old one, that was a mere shadow, to be obsolete. We know what that temple was to be?

John 2:19-22 ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. ²² So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken.

If Jesus Christ is the true temple that was torn down with His death, and we who have believed on Him and are now in Him by the Spirit, what does this tell us about the new temple that He is building?

^{NAU} **1 Corinthians 3:16** Do you not know that you are a temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you?

^{NAU} **Ephesians 2:21** in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy ¹temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

^{NAU} **1 Peter 2:5** you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

You and I in Christ are part of that holy temple and this is the temple that was prophesied to Israel.

^{NAU} **2 Corinthians 6:16** Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE."

Where do we first see this prophecy?

^{NAU} **Exodus 29:45** "I will dwell among the sons of Israel and will be their God.

^{NAU} **Jeremiah 31:1** "At that time," declares the LORD, "I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people."

Who are the families and sons of Israel according to Paul in 2Cor. 6:16?

We who are the temple of the living God. He's not talking about children of physical descent but of a spiritual seed, the seed of Abraham. All who are part of that seed, the same seed spoken to Adam and Eve are the same seed fulfilled in Christ.

Galatians 3:16 ¹⁶ Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ.

The household of God is going to be judged and will one day finally be purged of all of the Zedekiah's in the church who have apostasized. The great apostasy is the final culmination when the Lord will finally divide out the tares from the wheat, the sheep from the goats at the final judgment. Just like God judged the Israel of old He will judge the Israel of the New Covenant.

There will be invisible church made up of true believers, and there will be the visible church made up of both believer and unbelievers. And the apostasy will finally have reached the point where the church will be the church in name only.

Isaiah 1:18-25 ¹⁸ "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool. ¹⁹ "If you consent and obey, You will eat the best of the land; ²⁰ "But if you refuse and rebel, You will be devoured by the sword." Truly, the mouth of the LORD has spoken. ²¹ How the faithful city has become a harlot, She *who* was full of justice! Righteousness once lodged in her, But now murderers. ²² Your silver has become dross, Your drink diluted with water. ²³ Your rulers are rebels And companions of thieves; Everyone loves a bribe And chases after rewards. They do not defend the orphan, Nor does the widow's plea come before them. ²⁴ Therefore the Lord GOD of hosts, The Mighty One of Israel, declares, "Ah, I will be relieved of My adversaries And avenge Myself on My foes. ²⁵ "I will also turn My hand against you, And will smelt away your dross as with lye And will remove all your alloy.

1 Corinthians 6:15-20 ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! ¹⁶ Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body *with her*? For He says, "THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH." ¹⁷ But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit *with Him*. ¹⁸ Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own

body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰ For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

Notice the reference to the temple and what that temple is. It is the body of Christ made up of individuals who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit who gives life to that body through Christ.

But keep in mind that when we see references made to Israel in the O.T. as the people of God it is ultimately a picture of the Israel of God found in the N.T as well, as Paul has pointed out. But there will be a final judgment which will include the outward manifestation of the Israel of God, the N.T church, which is why we read that judgment begins with the household of God.

This judgment will come at the very end and the book of Revelation speaks of the harlot addressed in Isaiah who killed the prophets and messengers of God as the same harlot in the N.T. who does the same.

Revelation 17:1-6 ^{NAU} Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, ² with whom the kings of the earth committed *acts of* immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality." ³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns. ⁴ The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, ⁵ and on her forehead a name *was* written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." ⁶ And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly.

Revelation 19:1-5 ^{NAU} After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; ² BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER." ³ And a second time they said,

"Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER." ⁴
And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" ⁵ And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great."

When the Lord says in verse 2 that He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her, what is the "her" a reference to?

Israel.

2 Kings 9:5-10 ⁵ When he came, behold, the captains of the army were sitting, and he said, "I have a word for you, O captain." And Jehu said, "For which *one* of us?" And he said, "For you, O captain." ⁶ He arose and went into the house, and he poured the oil on his head and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'I have anointed you king over the people of the LORD, *even* over Israel. ⁷ 'You shall strike the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel. ⁸ 'For the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab every male person both bond and free in Israel. ⁹ 'I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. ¹⁰ 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury *her*.'" Then he opened the door and fled.

Ahab was a part of the apostate Israel who was in complete control of Israel and was identified as Israel. And as such is a harlot by going after other gods. In the last days this harlot will raise her ugly head once again and her name is the apostate church.

But this church will be the church only in name not in the Spirit. This is what the great apostasy will be. A church that has whored after other gods, by going after other teachings that deny Christ. Most of the major seminaries teach that a miraculous creation of the universe is not true. Many of the professors of these seminaries teach that Christ is not God, and the list goes on.

The book of Revelation is a book of God redeeming a people for Himself and bringing those people out of the land of bondage into the promised land of the new heavens and new earth. And the final reckoning or final judgment will show everyone who these people will be. Thus the separation of the wheat from the tares.

And what was the venue from which these two groups were separated?

The church.

Matthew 13:36-40 ³⁶ Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." ³⁷ And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, ³⁸ and the field is the world; and *as for* the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil *one*; ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.

Matthew 25:30-34 ³⁰ "Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ³¹ "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. ³² "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; ³³ and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Next week we will see another chapter in the life of O.T. Israel as God graciously moves them from the bondage of Babylon back into the land after 70 years of captivity.

2 Chronicles 36:22-23 ²² Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia-- in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah-- the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying, ²³ "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!'"

And we'll pursue this proclamation next time as we come to the book of Ezra.