

Last week we ended the book of 2Chronicles with Cyrus king of Persia making a declaration that the captives of Israel who were forced to move to Babylon, were to be given permission to go back to their land and rebuild the temple of God.

A little history will be helpful here at this point. We saw last week at the end of Chronicles that the king of Babylon had made an arrangement with Judah and its King Zedekiah that if they would humble themselves to the king of Babylon and pay him tribute there would be peace in the land.

Zedekiah would not do this and neither would the people of Judah and so therefore God brought judgment on His people and they were carried away into exile.

2 Chronicles 36:12-21 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. 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.

What we have here is 70 years of captivity of the Jews under Babylonian rule. During this time Nebuchadnezzar had died and Belshazzar had become king. It was under the rule of Belshazzar that Cyrus, king of Persia, would invade and take Babylon. Cyrus himself would enter into the great city of Babylon on Oct. 29, 539 BC. This was actually shortly after the death of Belshazzar.

Daniel 5:21-31 ²¹ "He was also driven away from mankind, and his heart was made like *that of beasts*, and his dwelling place *was* with the wild donkeys. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and *that* He sets over it whomever He wishes. ²² "Yet you, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, even though you knew all this, ²³ but you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines have been drinking wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which do not see, hear or understand. But the God in whose hand are your life-breath and your ways, you have not glorified. ²⁴ "Then the hand was sent from Him and this inscription was written out. ²⁵ "Now this is the inscription that was written out: 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.' ²⁶ "This is the interpretation of the message: 'MENE '-- God has numbered your kingdom and put an end to it. ²⁷ "'TEKEL '-- you have been weighed on the scales and found deficient. ²⁸ "'PERES '-- your kingdom has been divided and given over to the Medes and Persians." ²⁹ Then Belshazzar gave orders, and they clothed Daniel with purple and *put* a necklace of gold around his neck, and issued a proclamation concerning him that he *now* had authority as the third *ruler* in the kingdom. ³⁰ That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. ³¹ So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

By the way, Cyrus' participation in God's plan to release God's people was foretold through the prophet Isaiah as the one who would be used of God to allow His people to go back to their land, and of course this would be done as he invaded and overtook Babylon.

Isaiah 45:1-13 ^{NAU} Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue nations before

him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: ² "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. ³ "I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret places, So that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. ⁴ "For the sake of Jacob My servant, And Israel My chosen *one*, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor Though you have not known Me. ⁵ "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; ⁶ That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, ⁷ The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these. ⁸ "Drip down, O heavens, from above, And let the clouds pour down righteousness; Let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit, And righteousness spring up with it. I, the LORD, have created it. ⁹ "Woe to *the one* who quarrels with his Maker-- An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' Or the thing you are making say, 'He has no hands '? ¹⁰ "Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' Or to a woman, 'To what are you giving birth?'" ¹¹ Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker: "Ask Me about the things to come concerning My sons, And you shall commit to Me the work of My hands. ¹² "It is I who made the earth, and created man upon it. I stretched out the heavens with My hands And I ordained all their host. ¹³ "I have aroused him in righteousness And I will make all his ways smooth; He will build My city and will let My exiles go free, Without any payment or reward," says the LORD of hosts.

Keep in mind that Isaiah prophesied from about 762 BC to about 680 BC. In the passage that we just read Cyrus is mentioned by name. Cyrus would not be born until 559 BC. This prophecy, assuming it is near the end of Isaiah's life, was given around 120 years before the birth of Cyrus. This is one reason that critics believe that the book of Isaiah could not have been written around the late 600's BC.

Why would they assume this?

Because they assume there is no God who spoke to people concerning His will and His timetable of events. What is

interesting in the prophecy that we just read is how God views Cyrus.

From God's perspective, what seems to be the relationship?

Look at verse 28 of Isaiah of 44.

Isaiah 44:28 ²⁸ *"It is I* who says of Cyrus, *'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.'* And he declares of Jerusalem, *'She will be built,'* And of the temple, *'Your foundation will be laid.'"*

When God says of Cyrus that he is God's shepherd, what is implied?

That Cyrus will be used to lead God's people back to the land as a shepherd leads the sheep.

So, was Cyrus a noble man who loved the Jews?

No, he was a political man who did things for his own advantage.

So, why did Cyrus allow the Jews to go back to the land?

Because God moved him to do so.

And as we come to Ezra, chapter one, verse one, we see that the beginning of this account is identical with the last verse of 2Chronicles which denotes the continuity between the two books as an historical account that was lifted by the author of Ezra with purpose from 2Chronicles.

In fact, the historical accounts of Chronicles and Ezra are meant to be tied together with Nehemiah. The Jews originally viewed Nehemiah and Ezra as a single work. (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible).

We don't have the name of the author of Chronicles but most would agree that Ezra was the author of the book of Ezra and since the last verse of 2Chronicles is identical with the first verse of Ezra there is good reason to believe that Ezra wrote both.

Ezra himself was a priest and a descendant of Aaron. His return to the land after being in exile is dated in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7). The usual view has been that this was Artaxerxes I and the date therefore about 457 BC. (Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible).

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!'"

Ezra 1:1-3 ^{NAU} 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 all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying: ² "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. ³ 'Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem.

The phrase, "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia", is an interesting one. The first thing we notice is that the name Lord in the Hebrew is Yahweh or Jehovah. So, we are talking about the one true God and Creator moving a pagan king by the name of Cyrus.

The words, stirred up, can also be translated roused or awakened which makes it clear that Cyrus was not entertaining the idea of allowing the Jews to return to the land until God made an effectual change in the spirit of Cyrus.

And in stirring up Cyrus's spirit, Cyrus sends a proclamation throughout his entire kingdom, and he does so in writing so there would be no confusion regarding his intent.

Ezra 1:2 ² "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.

What does Cyrus seem to understand about his mission?

By the way, does anyone remember what other prophet is living in Babylon at this particular time?

Daniel. We know that he was prophesying for at least three years into the reign of Cyrus.

Daniel 10:1 ^{NAS} In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia a message was revealed to Daniel, who was named Belteshazzar; and the message was true and *one of* great conflict, but he understood the message and had an understanding of the vision.

Some have suggested that God did not necessarily give a vision or dream to Cyrus when Cyrus was moved by God to allow the Jews to go back to their land to rebuild the temple.

Notice again the words found in ^{NAU} **Ezra 1:1** 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 all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing,

We know that Daniel was living during the reign of Cyrus when Cyrus took Babylon. And it is apparent that Daniel was receiving prophecy in Babylon during the third year of Cyrus's reign. It is certainly possible that Cyrus didn't receive any special revelation from the Lord but was confronted with the truth of the prophecy of God's written word many years before that Daniel was now bringing to Cyrus.

In so doing, God moved the heart of Cyrus to take that word at face value and gave the orders that ultimately fulfilled the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah? I thought the prophecy with Cyrus' name was given by Isaiah.

Isaiah 44:28 - 45:5 ²⁸ "It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'" ^{NAU} **Isaiah 45:1** Thus says the LORD to Cyrus His anointed, Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue nations before him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: ² "I will go before you and make the rough places smooth; I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. ³ "I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden wealth of secret places, So that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name. ⁴ "For the sake of Jacob My servant, And Israel My chosen *one*, I have also called you by your name; I have given you a title of honor Though you have not known Me. ⁵ "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me;

Why then is the name of the prophet Jeremiah attached to the fulfillment that Cyrus would be called by God to allow the Jews to return to the land and how does that prophecy read?

Jeremiah 25:1-12 ^{NAU} The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), ² which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, ³ "From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened. ⁴ "And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear, ⁵ saying, 'Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the land which the LORD has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever; ⁶ and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm.' ⁷ "Yet you have not listened to Me," declares the LORD, "in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. ⁸ "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words, ⁹ behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and *I will send* to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. ¹⁰ 'Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹ "This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹² "Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.

Jeremiah 29:1-11 ^{NAU} Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. ² (This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the court officials, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the

craftsmen and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.) ³ *The letter was sent* by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, saying, ⁴ "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, ⁵ 'Build houses and live *in them*; and plant gardens and eat their produce. ⁶ 'Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease. ⁷ 'Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.' ⁸ "For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream. ⁹ 'For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them,' declares the LORD. ¹⁰ "For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

In Isaiah's prophecy the name of Cyrus is spoken of explicitly as the one who will rebuild Jerusalem and its temple, and so you would think that it would read in ^{NAU} **Ezra 1:1** Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of [*Isaiah*], the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, but it doesn't.

When you look at the prophecy of Jeremiah nowhere does it mention the name of Cyrus. But what it does do is to promise that God will punish the people of Judah and send them into exile. But He also promises that He will bring them back into the land after a period of 70 years.

So, why does Cyrus's heart get stirred up in fulfillment to the prophecy of Jeremiah? In Jeremiah's prophecy we see the heavy hand of God in judgment on His people, but also the merciful hand of His deliverance.

Keep in mind that it does not say that God spoke to Cyrus and in fulfillment to the prophecies of Jeremiah he was moved to allow the Jews to go back to their land and rebuild the temple.

And yet, it must be inferred that the prophet Daniel who was living in Babylon would more than likely have shared the prophecies of both Isaiah and Jeremiah with Cyrus and in turn God used this to show how His word was fulfilled.

It is in Jeremiah's prophecy that we see clearly that God is judge of not just His people but of all the nations. And by the way, Jeremiah was the most recent prophet who addressed the return to the land in relationship to the reign of Cyrus. In fact, Jeremiah died around 560 BC and Cyrus came to power in Babylon in 539 BC, 21 years after the death of Jeremiah. But, notice how God promises judgment upon His people.

Jeremiah 25:7-11 ⁷ "Yet you have not listened to Me," declares the LORD, "in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. ⁸ "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words, ⁹ behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and *I will send* to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. ¹⁰ 'Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹ "This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

But God doesn't stop with judging His people alone. For even though God uses Babylon to destroy Judah He does not hold Babylon guiltless for doing so. In fact, Jeremiah will record that God will destroy all the nations because they are still haters of God deserving His wrath.

Jeremiah 25:12-16 ¹² "Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation. ¹³ 'I will bring upon that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, all that is written in this book which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations. ¹⁴ '(For many nations and great kings will make slaves of them, even them; and I will recompense them according to their deeds and according to the work of their hands.)'" ¹⁵ For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, says to me, "Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand and cause all

the nations to whom I send you to drink it. ¹⁶ "They will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them."

And I'm sure that Daniel used the words of the prophecy of Jeremiah to make it clear that unless Cyrus sends the people back according to God's word he will suffer far worse judgment. That could be one way, "the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing... **Ezra 1:1**

The next time that we get together we'll look at this proclamation that he sent out to all the land of his kingdom.