

Ezra 1 - God's Hand in History

Introduction

- *Ezra*, Nehemiah and Esther - called “the post-captivity historical books”
- Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.- called “the post-captivity prophetic books”
- Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel have some overlap in time
- The capture and deportation of the people of Judah is detailed at the end of 2nd Chronicles and 2nd Kings.

They are books of History, and books of Prophecy. While we think of history as the written record of human events, we need to see that there is ***an OVERLAY of God's involvement*** in the affairs of men, and that ***in the drama of human history God is at work bringing about His Purpose.***

Profile of Ezra from the Life Application Study Bible

Ezra was a priest, a scribe, and a great leader. His name means “help”, and his whole life was dedicated to serving God and God's people. Tradition says that Ezra wrote most of 1st and 2nd Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Psalm 119 and that he led the council of 120 men who compiled the Old Testament canon. **The narrative of the book of Ezra is centered on God and his promise that the Jews would return to their land, as prophesied by Jeremiah. *This message formed the core of Ezra's life.*** The last half of the book gives a very personal glimpse of Ezra. His knowledge of Scripture and his God-given wisdom were so obvious to the king that he appointed Ezra to lead the second emigration to Jerusalem, to teach the people God's Word and to administer national life.

What happened before the book of Ezra?

Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin.....did evil in the eyes of the LORD.....Nebuchadnezzar carried them off to Babylon.....**Zedekiah** did evil in the eyes of the LORD his God and ***did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet***, who spoke the word of the LORD. 13 He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God's name. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the LORD, the God of Israel.

2Ch 36:14-21 Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the LORD, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem. 15 The LORD, the God of their ancestors, ***sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.*** 16 But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy. 17 He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and did not spare young men or young women, the elderly or the infirm. ***God gave them all into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.*** 18 He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the LORD's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. 19 They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. 20 He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors ***until the kingdom of Persia came to power.***

Jeremiah's Prophecies (70 yrs captivity)

Jer 25:1-3 NIV The word came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. 2 So Jeremiah the prophet said to all the people of Judah and to all those living in Jerusalem: 3 ***For twenty-three years--from the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah until this very day--the word of the LORD has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened***

Jer 25:11 NIV This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon ***seventy years***.

This exile to Babylon was the LORD's doing, - it was not history out of control

Jer 29:10-14 NIV This is what the LORD says: "***When seventy years are completed*** for Babylon, I will come to you and ***fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place***. 11 For ***I know the plans I have for you,***" declares the LORD, "***plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future***. 12 Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and ***I will listen*** to you. 13 You will seek me and ***find me*** when you seek me with all your heart. 14 ***I will be found by you,***" declares the LORD, "and ***will bring you back*** from captivity. ***I will gather you*** from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and ***will bring you back*** to the place from which I carried you into exile."

What Does This Reveal About God?

He used the movements of armies and the histories of nations to purify his people - to get them focused again on the right things- and He was personally involved in the process

- The LORD will NOT FORGET ---- When 70 years are completed
- The LORD is personally INVOLVED --- I WILL COME TO YOU
- The LORD is FAITHFUL - I will fulfill my good promise to bring you back to Jerusalem
- Everything the LORD does is to work GOOD --- He has plans for them - He has NOT written them off...The exile to Babylon was not to cast them away, but an extreme measure to get their attention...He is taking them to a place where they would seek him - direct opposite of PRE CAPTIVITY
 - **Plans to prosper, not to harm, to give you a hope and a future**
 - **Their prosperity, hope and future were tied directly to their seeking Him**
- The LORD is ATTENTIVE to His people and again PERSONALLY involved
 - They would call on Him and pray to Him, **HE would listen**
 - They would seek Him and **they will FIND** Him when they seek with all their heart
 - He will **BRING THEM BACK**
- Think of the kinds of people who were formed in the exile to Babylon
 - [Daniel, Shadrach Meshach and Abednego] others??
- He disciplines those He loves

God's Hand in History - He Watches Over His Word to Perform It

Ezr 1:1-2 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, ***in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia*** to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing: (2) "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.

vs 1...in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD [ACTED - MOVED]

- Jer 1:12 NIV The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled."

We should be confident in the certainty of His Word --- what He has said will come to pass

- Mat 24:35 NIV Heaven and earth will pass away, but ***my words will never pass away.***
- Num 23:19 NIV God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? ***Does he promise and not fulfill?***

Daniel [in Babylon] was aware of God's purpose and God's timing because he believed the Scripture - He was moved to intercede because of Jeremiah's prophecy

- Dan 9:1-18 NIV In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom-- (2) in the first year of his reign, ***I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.*** (3) ***So I turned*** to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. (4) I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

May we be those who believe in the word, who gain understanding from the word, and who are moved to prayer and action based upon the things we see in the word

God's Hand in History - He Moves the Hearts of Men to Fulfill His Purpose

Ezr 1:1 & 3-5 ***the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia*** to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:(3) Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. (4) And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem." (5) Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites--***everyone whose heart God had moved***--prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem.

STRONG's - **move the heart** [through the idea of **opening the eyes**]; to **wake** (literally or figuratively)]

- vs 1 the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia
- vs 5 everyone whose heart God had moved
- Hag 1:13-15 NIV Then Haggai, the LORD's messenger, gave this message of the LORD to the people: "I am with you," declares the LORD. (14) So **the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people.** They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God, (15) on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month. In the second year of King Darius,

The LORD Moved the Heart of Cyrus

Maybe Daniel showed these scriptures to Cyrus - He had an audience with him

- Isaiah prophesied these things 150 years before Cyrus was born, 180 years before Cyrus performed any of these feats

Isa 44:28 NIV **who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd** and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "**Let it be rebuilt,**" and of the temple, "**Let its foundations be laid.**"

Isa 45:1-7 NIV "This is what the LORD says **to his anointed, to Cyrus,** whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: 2 **I will go before you** and will level the mountains; **I will break down gates of bronze** and cut through bars of iron. 3 **I will give you hidden treasures,** riches stored in secret places, **so that you may know that I am the LORD,** the God of Israel, **who summons you by name.** 4 For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, **I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me.** 5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. **I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me,** 6 so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. 7 I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

- Maybe this is why Cyrus said this in the written proclamation -

(2) "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.

Isa 45:11-13 NIV "This is what the LORD says-- the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? 12 It is I who made the earth and created mankind on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts. 13 **I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty.**"

God's Hand in History - He Provides Every Resource to Fulfill His Purpose

Ezra 1:4 & 6-11 (4) And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.'..... All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings. (7) **Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god.** (8) Cyrus king of Persia had them brought by Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to **Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.** (9) This was the inventory: gold dishes, 30; silver dishes, 1,000; silver pans, 29; (10) gold bowls, 30; matching silver bowls, 410; other articles, 1,000. (11) In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver. **Sheshbazzar** brought all these along with the exiles when they came up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

What was taken from the temple in Jerusalem, was kept in the temple of Nebuchadnezzar's god for 70 years, now restored to its rightful place.

Summary

- God has a purpose that is alive and well regardless of what is happening on the earth
- History is HIS STORY
- God still has a plan for your life even if you have failed Him
- Stay in the word of God to receive Revelation and Hope like Daniel did
- Act when God moves upon your heart
- God always provides for HIS purpose to be fulfilled - we never have to worry about this