

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

C1317 – May 8, 2013 – Ezra 1:1-11
Cyrus' Decree

If you will turn in your Bible to 1 Chronicles 17:10. We're studying the Book of Ezra and we learned last time that Ezra was a scribe as well as a priest in the righteous line of Zadok and that he authored the priestly book of Chronicles as well as Ezra. Ezra just continues the story of Chronicles. So by looking at 1 Chronicles 17:10 we are looking at something Ezra wrote or at least compiled from earlier writings. The reason we're looking at this passage is because the central theme of Ezra is the Davidic Covenant. And we find the terms of that covenant in 1 Chron 17:10b-14. God says, "I will subdue all your enemies. Moreover, I tell you that the LORD will build a house for you. ¹¹"When your days are fulfilled that you must go *to be* with your fathers, that I will set up *one of* your descendants after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. ¹²"He shall build for Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever." Who is this son of David? People think its Solomon; it's not Solomon. It's the Messiah. It's looking to a distant son. Verse 13, "I will be his father and he shall be My son; and I will not take My lovingkindness away from him, as I took it from him who was before you." Who did God remove His lovingkindness from before David? Saul. Saul lost his dynasty. But God is promising that David's distant son, the Messiah will never lose his dynasty. Verse 14, "But I will settle him in My house and in My kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever." ' ' ' There is the promise from God that David's line will culminate in the Messiah who will dwell in God's house, the Temple forever and He will reign in God's kingdom forever and His throne will be established forever.

The problem is that 400 years later David's line went into Exile to Babylon and God revealed to Daniel that a series of four Gentile kingdoms would reign before God's covenant program in the kingdom of God would be restored. How would the Temple purpose of God ever be realized now that it

lay in dust and ashes? How would the throne of David survive when this line was living among Gentiles influenced by Satan? In short, how would God's covenant promises to David remain intact when they were living out among Gentile powers that were influenced by Satan and vastly powerful? For all intents and purposes it seemed that Satan had the upper hand.

First of all, for example, how could the Jews ever return to the land to rebuild the Temple when Satan didn't want Gentile rulers to permit them to return? Satan's strategy in this period was two-fold. First, to influence Gentile rulers to make laws against the Jews that would lead to their destruction. Second, to fill the Promised Land with enemies of the Jews who would resist any attempt by Jews to return. God's counter to these two strategies was to sovereignly break through Satanic deception of Gentile kings and influence them to favor the Jews instead of pronounce laws against them. This would secure the ultimate progress of Jews returning to the land to rebuild the Temple. In Ezra the story is recounted how God broke through Satanic deception of Cyrus, king of Persia, and used him to issue a decree permitting the Jews to return to the land and rebuild the Temple in the midst of enemies in the land who attempted to hinder their progress.

Second of all, how would the Davidic line survive during these four Gentile kingdoms when Satan wanted to corrupt this line by influencing intermarriage with pagans? Satan's strategy was to fill the land with beautiful pagan women in order to tempt Jews to marry them. God's counter-strategy was to raise up a Bible teacher, Ezra, to teach the word of God so the people were convicted of their sin and would cast off their wives, maintaining the purity of the Davidic line. This is the story of Ezra 7-10.

The overall point is that God is sovereign and able to overcome Satan's strategies to thwart God's plan in the Davidic covenant.

Ezra 1 begins by discussing how God brought them back to the land. Vv 1-4 reveal that God sovereignly stirred up Cyrus to issue a decree to return and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. VV 5-11 reveal that God sovereignly stirred up the Judeans to return to the land as well as locals to make provisions for their return journey and the rebuilding of the Temple.

Starting in verse 1, **Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia.** The sentence begins with the Hebrew *waw*, meaning “and” or “now” and signals that the book is the continuation of a story. The story it continues comes from Chronicles. The story in Chronicles ends in 2 Chron 36:20, “Those who had escaped from the sword he [Nebuchadnezzar] carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹to 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.” Judah had gone into Exile to Babylon beginning in 605BC when Daniel and his friends were taken into captivity. They were taken into captivity because they had not followed the law that required them to give the land a sabbath rest every seventh year. Instead of trusting and obeying the Lord and letting the land rest every seventh year they planted in the fields. Therefore the duration of the exile to Babylon was reckoned on the basis of how many sabbath rests they had not kept. Since the exile was seventy years then they had not kept the sabbath rest for 490 years. In order for the land to have its rest God scheduled seventy years of exile from the land in Babylon. The story of Ezra picks up when the seventy years was completed and the first king of Persia, Cyrus, defeated the Babylonians.

In the Book of Daniel we learned that Cyrus’ armies, under the command of Darius the Mede, took Babylon without a fight on the night that Belshazzar was having a great banquet and requested the vessels from the temple of Jerusalem be brought so they could drink wine from them and praise the gods of gold and silver and bronze and wood and stone which do not hear or speak. When they engaged in this idolatry with the vessels from the Temple of God a hand appeared and wrote on the wall. The message was that Belshazzar had been weighed and found wanting, his days were numbered and his kingdom was being divided. On that night Cyrus’ armies had already diverted the waters of the Euphrates River and entered the city. Within minutes they had arrived at the banquet hall and taken the city without a fight. That occurred in October of 539BC. Since the first year of a king was not reckoned as a regal year but as an accession year then the **first year of Cyrus king of Persia** in Ezra 1:1 was 538BC. In that year Cyrus enjoyed his first year holding the title, “king of Babylon,” which was the title denoting the highest position in the civilized world. Before this he had reigned as king of Arshan of Elam from 559-550BC. In 550BC he became king of Medo-Persia

and in 539 he conquered Babylon and so the next year became his first regal year as king of the world.

We are told next that in 538BC, **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. ³Whoever 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. ⁴Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.’”** Skip down to verse 7, **Also King Cyrus brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and put in the house of his gods; ⁸and Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.** He’s sending the vessels back to the house of God in Jerusalem with the returnees to rebuild the house. Now this is an interesting policy. Nobody did this before, they just deported them. And you might get the impression from this that Cyrus was a believer in the Jewish God and that is why he is favorable to them. However, that is not the case. The discovery of the Cyrus Cylinder indicates that Cyrus was an Iranian polytheist, religiously tolerant, but a firm worshipper of Marduk, a Babylonian god. His polytheism meant that He believed there were many gods and goddesses and that they each ruled a province in his kingdom. He therefore thought that these gods and goddesses should be worshipped in their respective provinces in order to ensure that every region of his vast kingdom would prosper. Therefore what Cyrus is doing here in vv 1-8 is taking the research of people in his administration. And if you remember Daniel was high up in this administration. He was a top official and I take it that Daniel was instrumental in getting the information about all these provinces together so that Cyrus could enact his policy and return the various peoples to their homelands and restore the sanctuaries of the gods and goddesses in those provinces. So I’m not seeing this as a policy that

is only toward the Jews, I'm seeing this as a kingdom-wide policy that gave the right of return to all the peoples in the kingdom and I believe Jeremiah's prophecy predicts the same thing. But since informed the king through the proper channels that the God that occupied the province of Judah was YHWH he is restoring the worship of YHWH in Judah in order to ensure the prosperity of his kingdom in that province.

Now as I mentioned Cyrus recognized one god as above all gods and that god was not YHWH, it was Marduk. Marduk was centrally worshiped in the city of Babylon. Cyrus believed that the worship of Marduk had become so apostate under the Babylonians that Marduk had raised him up to conquer the city and restore the proper worship of Marduk. He says, "...the lord of the gods...He scanned and looked (through) all the countries, searching for a righteous ruler willing to lead him (i.e. Marduk) (in the annual procession). (Then) he pronounced the name of Cyrus (*Ku-ra-aš*), king of Anshan, declared him (lit.: pronounced [his] name) to be(come) the ruler of all the world."ⁱ In other words, Cyrus is interpreting his life in hindsight and he says Marduk chose me to be ruler of all the world. He gives the reason Marduk chose him in another place where he says, "Marduk, the great lord, a protector of his people/worshippers, beheld with pleasure his (i.e. Cyrus') good deeds and his upright mind (lit.: heart) (and therefore) ordered him to march against his city Babylon (*K á. d i n g i r. r a*). He made him set out on the road to Babylon (*din.tir^{ki}*) going at his side like a real friend. His widespread troops—their number, like that of the water of a river, could not be established—strolled along, their weapons packed away. Without any battle, he made him enter his town Babylon (*Š u. a n. n a*), sparing Babylon (*K á. d i n g i r. r a^{ki}*) any calamity. He delivered into his (i.e. Cyrus') hands Nabonidus, the king who did not worship him (i.e. Marduk)."ⁱⁱ In other words, Marduk chose him to rule the world because of his good works and his proper worship of Marduk and that's why he had victory over Babylon. Cyrus was into a works-based religion. In another place he tells us that his chief worship went to Marduk, "When I entered Babylon (*din.tir^{ki}*) as a friend and (when) I established the seat of the government in the palace of the ruler under jubilation and rejoicing, Marduk, the great lord, [induced] the magnanimous inhabitants of Babylon (*din.tir^{ki}*) [to love me], and I was daily endeavouring to worship him."ⁱⁱⁱ So you see clearly here that he did not worship YHWH but Marduk. So don't conclude for a minute that because Cyrus gave the Jews the right to return and rebuild the Temple and restore the vessels to that Temple he was

a believer in YHWH. He was not a believer. He was an Iranian polytheist who believed that each province in his kingdom had a god or gods that occupied them and therefore to ensure the prosperity of his entire kingdom he would be wise to restore the people and the worship of the gods of those people in their respective provinces. Therefore this policy was enacted kingdom-wide toward all the various peoples in his kingdom and as we learned from Esther, there were many people groups, many cultures, many languages spoken in the kingdom. Israel just happens to be one of them from Cyrus' point of view.

However, from God's point of view Cyrus was fulfilling prophecy that came from the mouth of Jeremiah. Notice verse 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.** Jeremiah had prophesied. Turn to Jer 25. Now you'll notice in verse 1 that the prophecy concerned "the people of Judah." That was the tribe David came from and thus the Davidic line is included and he's reminding them that he warned them to turn from their evil ways but they didn't and so verse 11, "This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 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." In other words, Babylon would reign for seventy years. Notice, not just over Judah, but verse 11 says "nations" plural and that looks back to verse 9 where God says he would send Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, His servant, against this land and its inhabitants and against all these nations round about. So when Nebuchadnezzar conquered he conquered many nations, only one of which was Judah. But his dominion would last just seventy years and then all those nations would be given the right of return. Cyrus did that. And so Jer 25:11-12 is one of the prophecies Ezra is citing that Cyrus fulfilled when he gave the Judeans the right of return.

Turn to Jer 27:19 for another prophecy Cyrus fulfilled. This one concerns the temple vessels. Some of them we said in Daniel 1:2 were taken in 605BC at the first deportation, but not all of them. Some of them were left for the time being. Verse 19 explains, "For thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the pillars, concerning the sea, concerning the stands and concerning the rest of the vessels that are left in this city, ²⁰which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon

did not take when he carried into exile Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem.” Including Daniel and his friends. Verse 21, “Yes, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that are left in the house of the LORD and in the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem, ²²‘They will be carried to Babylon and they will be there until the day I visit them,’ declares the LORD. ‘Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place.’” So the other vessels would be taken either in 597BC or 586BC, but they would be brought back and restored to the Temple. And clearly Cyrus fulfilled this in Ezra 1:1 because he not only made a proclamation that the Jews return to the land and rebuild the temple but he also brought out all the vessels and counted them out and gave them to one named Shesbazzar, the prince of Judah. Why did Cyrus do this? Ultimately it was to fulfill this prophecy in Jeremiah 27:19-22.

Turn to Jer 29. You notice in verse 2 that this letter was sent after the members of the royal house had already departed from Jerusalem. And he’s telling them to make a life in Babylon but not get too attached to Babylon. In other words, be in the world but do not become a part of the world. And verse 10 explains why, “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.’” And everybody quotes that for America. It has nothing to do with America. It has to do with the tribe of Judah. Putting America in there is a dodo interpretation. God does not have plans of welfare for America. It’s exactly the opposite, He has plans of calamity. We are part of the Gentile kingdoms; we do not have a future and a hope. That is nonsense and a complete deception. This is for Judah in Babylon for seventy years and then brought back to Jerusalem from Babylon after the seventy years. Verse 12, “Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.” So again, the prophecy was seventy years and Cyrus was involved in fulfilling this prophecy. So I give you three prophecies, all from Jeremiah that Ezra says Cyrus fulfilled; Jer 25:11-12; Jer 27:19-22 and Jer 29:10-12. They would be conquered by Babylon so that the land would lay desolate for seventy years to fulfill its sabbaths, the vessels would be taken to Babylon and the temple would remain in ruins for seventy years.

Returning to Ezra 1, still in verse 1, what was the means by which God fulfilled these prophecies? Answer, **the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia**. Now the expression **stirred up the spirit** or “heart” is a favorite expression during the exile. It’s used a number of times by exilic writers (cf Ezra 1:5; 1 Chron 5:26; 2 Chron 21:16; 36:22; Jer 51:11; Hag 1:4). The point of this expression is to show the sovereign providential hand of God behind the events of history. Since Israel is in Exile then God’s chief means of working is providential, behind the scenes work, just the same as we saw in Esther. Just as God turned the heart of King Ahasuerus to look with favor on Esther when she entered the king’s presence unannounced, so God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia to proclaim the exiles return. Proverbs 21:1 says, “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.” God is sovereign over kings and God is sovereign over Cyrus. In fact Cyrus was prophesied by name almost 200 years before.

Turn to Isa 44:28. “*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.*’” ¹Thus 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; ⁶That 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, ⁷The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.” Josephus says Cyrus read this passage and Daniel may have showed it to him. But Cyrus was not a believer. As the end of verse 4 clearly states, God called him by name, God gave him a title of honor, but he did not know God. God is sovereign over the hearts of kings and turns them wherever He wishes, for the sake of Israel, for the sake of His covenant. The interesting thing is that it was the LORD who stirred up the spirit of Cyrus

in verse 1 to send out this proclamation but the proclamation was consistent with his religious beliefs. It is evident once more that a man always does what he wants to do but what a man does is what God planned them to do. You cannot escape the sovereignty of God. God is sovereign.

So at the end of Ezra 1:1 the king **sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom** for there were Jews who lived in all provinces of the kingdom. And Daniel was third in the kingdom; Cyrus the king, Darius under him and then Daniel over the three commissioners. So I'm seeing Daniel closely related to the sending out of this proclamation. But also, notice the end of the verse, he **also put it in writing**. Now why does that matter? Because later there are going to be enemies of the Judeans in the land who are going to try and hinder them from rebuilding, saying they are trying to do something evil contrary to the king. But since Cyrus' original decree was put in writing then court officials could go through the royal chronicles and discover Cyrus' original decree and confirm what the Judeans were doing so they could continue rebuilding the Temple. So this document is going to become important later.

Now for the proclamation in verse 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.** Now the name of God he uses is very strong and I suggest it comes from Daniel because Daniel referred to God as **the God of heaven** a number of times when he talked to Nebuchadnezzar (cf Daniel 2:18, 19, 37, 44). And so I see Daniel having personal contact with Cyrus and Cyrus picking up the language of Daniel and using it in his proclamation. I would also suggest that Daniel took Isaiah's prophecy to Cyrus and said, hey, here you are and Cyrus read Isaiah because the language used here in the proclamation that **the God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth** is a summary explanation of what Isaiah said. So putting Daniel and Isaiah together in front of the king's eyes I suspect Cyrus is influenced strongly by the word of God, it's just that for him YHWH is just another god, he believed in many gods.

Now the proclamation has to do first of all with **building** God a house **in Jerusalem** which is obviously the Temple. Cyrus himself wanted this because YHWH was the God of that region and worship of Him in that region

would bring blessing to his kingdom. But from God's point of view this would move things toward the Davidic covenant which predicts an eternal temple.

Verse 3, **'Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him!** See, He's not Cyrus' God, but if He is your God, Cyrus says, go up. He's giving the right of return. Now to see that the people were supposed to return turn to Isa 48:20. The exiles were supposed to return after the seventy years. They were supposed to re-align themselves with God's theocratic program centering on worship in the Temple. Of course, Esther's parents didn't exercise that right, neither did Mordecai. But some Jews did, about 50,000, as we'll find out next week, followed Isa 48:20 when the seventy years elapsed and Cyrus issued the decree. "Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Declare with the sound of joyful shouting, proclaim this, Send it out to the end of the earth; Say, "The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob." It was to be a testimony to the nations on the basis of Jeremiah's promises that after seventy years they would be restored and the one who would declare the restoration was named in Isaiah to be Cyrus.

Now the problem and why so few Jews out of the entire population returned is due to the fact that the Jews made a good life in Babylon. Hester says, "Doubtless many had become firmly established in profitable business ventures; numbers had formed strong friendships in Babylonia which led to marriages in considerable number with people in this adopted land. No doubt many of them lacked faith to leave a land where they were economically and politically secure and undertake the long journey of eight hundred miles back to the poor little country where their lives would be marked by hardships and limitations." (Hester, *The Heart of Hebrew History*, p 259-260) And yet that is exactly what God wanted them to do. Josephus confirms this mentality among the exiles when he says, "When Cyrus had said this to the Israelites, the rulers of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with the Levites and priests, went in haste to Jerusalem, yet did many of them stay at Babylon, as not willing to leave their possessions;" (Josephus, *Antiquities*, XI, I 3)^{iv}

So most Jews did not want to uproot their lives and move to a place that was in ruins. It was easier to stay where they already had a life and private property and friends and businesses. So they exchanged the will of God for the easy way out. But 50,000 did return and it's those 50,000 we'll be

interested in learning about in coming weeks. So the first part of Cyrus' decree is the right of return.

The second part is also in verse 3, **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.** That expression really shows you once again how Cyrus thought, he was a polytheist, he believed YHWH was God in Jerusalem, but he was not God in Babylon or Nippur or Ecbatana, He was only God in Jerusalem. So he gives the people of that area the right to rebuild the Temple to that God so that his kingdom would prosper.

Verse 4, **'Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.'**” So Cyrus was favorable toward the Jews by calling on Gentiles in all the provinces of his kingdom to give financial support to the Jews who are returning as well as an **offering** for the rebuilding of the Temple in order to secure its rebuilding.

Verse 5 and here we come to the sovereign providence of God once more stirring up people's hearts to take certain actions, interfering with what people call free will which is a thing that doesn't exist. Verse 5, **Then the heads of fathers' households of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.** God did to these people's hearts the same thing he did to Cyrus' heart in verse 1. He turned it so that they had certain desires they didn't have before so that they would take certain actions. Uprooting their entire lives and starting an arduous journey, trading a relaxed, peaceful lifestyle for a difficult, disturbing lifestyle. But all because God put in their heart a desire to **go up and rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.** The mention of **Judah** is the first hint that the book concerns the house of Judah from which David came and through whom the Messiah would come. It may also be seen that God commanded all of them to return but He only stirred up the hearts of some of them to return. Just because God gives a commandment does not mean everyone can follow. God has to do a work in our life so that we can follow. So they **arose**. The Hebrew means they started making preparations for the journey.

Verse 6, help was not far off, **All those about them encouraged them with articles of silver, with gold, with goods, with cattle and with valuables, aside from all that was given as a freewill offering.** The Hebrew **encouraged** means “strengthened their hands,” that is, they enabled them by financial assets to acquire the necessities for making such an arduous journey. In addition to this they also gave them financial assets for the Temple. I would suggest that God stirred up these people in the kingdom to aid the Jews in these respects.

Verse 7, **Also King Cyrus brought out the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and put in the house of his gods; ⁸and Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.** Again, this reversal of policy answers to Jer 27:19-22 which predicted that all the temple articles would be taken to Babylon but that they would be restored. Obviously, knowing Cyrus we realize that he considered it a necessary part of proper worship in each province to restore the proper articles. And so he had his **treasurer Mithredath** go into the vast treasury and pull out all the articles that came from the house of the Lord in Jerusalem during **Nebuchadnezzar’s** reign and start counting them out to a man named **Sheshbazzar**. Now **Sheshbazzar** is called **the prince of Judah**. He’s actually in the line of David through Solomon that culminates in Joseph who was supposedly the father of Jesus. His uncle was Zerubbabel and you can read his name in Matt 1 genealogy of Joseph. This line was cursed because of Jeconiah in Jer 22 so the Messiah could not be the legitimate son of Joseph which is Matthew’s point. He had to be born of a virgin, though Joseph could adopt Jesus as his legitimate son. So Sheshbazzar is another indicator that the concerns here are Messianic.

Now these vessels that are handed over to him form a link with the prior Solomonic temple. In other words, there is continuity between these two temples in that the same articles used in Solomon’s temple were used in this temple. However, this temple will be of much less glory. As one author says, “The general plan of the second Temple built under Zerubbabel was similar to the first built under Solomon. But the holy of holies was left empty as the ark had been lost through the Babylonian conquest. According to Josephus

the high priest on the day of Atonement placed his censer on the slab of stone that marked the former position of the ark (cf. 1 Maccabees 1:21; 4:49–51). The holy place was furnished with a table for the shewbread, the incense altar, and one menorah instead of Solomon's ten." ^v So it was nothing compared with the Solomon's temple but it did form a link with Solomon's temple because of the articles.

Verse 9, **Now this was their number: 30 gold dishes, 1,000 silver dishes, 29 duplicates; ¹⁰30 gold bowls, 410 silver bowls of a second kind and 1,000 other articles. ¹¹All the articles of gold and silver numbered 5,400. Sheshbazzar brought them all up with the exiles who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.** The numbers don't add up to 5,400, they only add up to 2,499. The probable reason is that only the larger, more important articles are counted up to 2,499, whereas when you add the smaller, lesser important articles the count comes to 5,400.

In conclusion, this chapter begins with God moving the heart of the pagan Persian king Cyrus to issue a decree allowing the Jews to return to their land (1:1-4). This work was consistent with what God had earlier promised through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 25:11; 29:10). Thus, God's present work was consistent with His previously articulated promises. The exile had not abrogated God's covenant program. Just as God had providentially preserved His elect nation through the seventy-year exile, He was now continuing His work on their behalf by allowing them to return to their land. God's unilateral activity to bring about this end is also evidenced through how He stirred the hearts of the others to financially contribute to those making this return trip (1:5-6). God's sovereign action was so sweeping that He even caused Cyrus to return to the Jews the temple treasures (1:7-11) that had been taken from the Jewish temple by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar nearly seventy years earlier (Dan 1:2).

Alright, what can we learn from chapter 1? First, God was sovereignly working on behalf of Israel even during their Exile when they had no legal claim to His protection. God has not cast His people off because God has integrity and will never go back on His word in the covenants. Second, the fulfillment of Isaiah concerning Cyrus and of Jeremiah concerning the partial restoration assure the Jews that God will ultimately fulfill all His prophecies including the total restoration at the end of the times of the Gentiles. The

Jews can have confidence that they are still His people and He is still their God. Third, God is working for Israel in a providential manner described as stirring up the hearts of Gentile kings, Gentile people and Israeli's to accomplish His plan. Fourth, if God was working for Israel in such manner in prior generations then it would ensure Jews of later generations that He is still working in such a manner. Thus the book teaches us that God is the sovereign ruler of history and works on Israel's behalf providentially.

ⁱ *The ancient Near East an anthology of texts and pictures*. 1969 (J. B. Pritchard, Ed.) (3rd ed. with Supplement) (315). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

ⁱⁱ *The ancient Near East an anthology of texts and pictures*. 1969 (J. B. Pritchard, Ed.) (3rd ed. with Supplement) (315–316). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ *The ancient Near East an anthology of texts and pictures*. 1969 (J. B. Pritchard, Ed.) (3rd ed. with Supplement) (316). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

^{iv} Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: Complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

^v *Vol. 137: Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 137*. 1980 (547) (204). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary.

[Back To The Top](#)

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