

An Unlikely Ally

(Ezra 1:1-4)

Yearly Theme: *“Peace is...”*

Series Title: *“A Return to Peace”*

July 18th, 2021

Something to think about:

As we continue in our series today entitled, “Return to Peace,” we come upon the book of Ezra in the Old Testament. In the very first chapter, we read of the beginning of the return of the Jewish people back to Jerusalem from exile under the authority of the Medo-Persian Emperor, Cyrus. And though Ezra viewed Cyrus’ proclamation as a fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy, unless a person is willing to see and/or perceived GOD’s actions in the world as divine, they often miss the hand of GOD working to bring about his purposes in spite of the persons in power at the time.

Cyrus was a pagan king who worshiped false gods, and yet GOD used him to fulfill His purposes. Let’s take a look...

Ezra 1:1-4 (NLT),

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the LORD fulfilled the prophecy he had given through Jeremiah. He stirred the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom:

² *“This is what King Cyrus of Persia says:*

“The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³ Any of you who are his people may go to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. And may your God be with you! ⁴ Wherever this Jewish remnant is found, let their neighbors contribute toward their expenses by giving them silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock, as well as a voluntary offering for the Temple of God in Jerusalem.” ¹

Now this may all seem coincidental, unless one knows the history involved here. In reference to verse 1, Jeremiah’s prophecy is found in:

Jeremiah 25:11 (NLT), This entire land will become a desolate wasteland. Israel and her neighboring lands will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.

Jeremiah 29:10 (NLT), This is what the LORD says: “You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again.

In addition to Jeremiah’s prophecy of the 70-years of exile of the people of GOD, Isaiah also prophesied about this event, and more specifically the return of the exiles back to Jerusalem under a king by the name of Cyrus some 150 years before this actually happened.

“The prophecy about Cyrus. King Cyrus of Persia would one day make it possible for the Jews to return home from their exile in Babylon (see the book of [Ezra](#)). Isaiah predicted this great event, even mentioning Cyrus by name ([Isa. 44:28; 45:1](#)), some 150 years before Cyrus’s time.”²

So, what’s the takeaway from all of this this morning? Well, it’s important to remember that...

Key Point: “God’s purposes can be fulfilled through some of the most unlikely people.”

How does GOD accomplish this? Let’s take a look:

- **Though Cyrus was a benevolent king, his motives were more than likely political.**

In contrast to the kings of Babylon, Cyrus (the Medo-Persian King) would rule the vassal states very differently. Instead of brute force and intimidation, Cyrus would garner the support of the various nation-states within the Persian Empire by allowing them to reestablish their own cities, cultures, and ways of worship. He would allow them the freedom to do what their ancestors had done before Babylon had forced them into submission.

- **Cyrus was not dismissive of GOD (Yahweh), but believed that He had allowed him to be placed in power.**

Ezra 1:2b-3a (NLT), “The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has appointed me to build him a Temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³ Any of you who are his people may go to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem.

- **Much like their exodus from Egypt, GOD allowed the Jewish people another exodus as a reminder that He still loves them and is in control.**

Ezra 1:4 (NLT), Wherever this Jewish remnant is found, let their neighbors contribute toward their expenses by giving them silver and gold, supplies for the journey, and livestock, as well as a voluntary offering for the Temple of God in Jerusalem.”

Something to take home:

Are you missing GOD because your eyes aren’t open to the unexpected? Are you closed off to GOD’s blessings and provisions all because He isn’t working according to your preconceived notions?

Many of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day completely missed GOD because they were expecting a different type of Messiah. In fact, they became inadvertent enemies of GOD by rejecting His offer of salvation through Jesus. May we not be so blinded by our own pride and arrogance that we miss GOD along the way.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ezra 1:1–4). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

² ESV notes.