

Ezra 1

Verses 1- 4

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: 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 rebuild for Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. ³Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with 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. ⁴And every survivor, at whatever place he may live, the people of that place are to support him with silver and gold, with equipment and cattle, together with a voluntary offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.’”

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:

See chart 105

Events	Other	Year
Cyrus releases Jews	1st Return	539 BC
Second temple begun		538 BC
Work stopped	15 years	536 - 520 BC
Work begins again		520 BC
Haggai		520 BC
Zechariah		520 - 518 BC
Second temple dedicated		516 BC

Jeremiah said the deportation would last 70 years.

See Jeremiah 25:11

¹¹ This entire land will be a place of ruins and an object of horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.

The deportation was counted from the destruction of the temple in 586 BC until the second temple was rebuilt and dedicated in 516 BC.

See chart 110

Exile to Babylon and return to Jerusalem		
Events	Other	Year BC
Deportation to Babylon	1st	605
Deportation to Babylon	2nd	597
Deportation to Babylon	Final	586
Destruction of the temple		586 BC
Cyrus releases Jews	1st Return	539
Foundation of temple completed		538 - 536
Work stopped	15 years	536 - 520
Haggai		520
Zechariah		520 - 518
Work on the Temple begins again		520
Second temple dedicated		516 BC

70 years

God gave the land the Sabbaths which Israel had neglected to follow.

See 2 Chronicles 36:21

²⁰ He took into exile those who had escaped from the sword 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 the Sabbath until seventy years were complete.

Apparently Israel had neglected the 7th year Sabbath of rest for the Land 70 times between 1391 BC and 586 BC. This would mean that they kept the 7th year Sabbath of rest for the land 45 times out of the 115 possible or 39% of the time.

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 rebuild for Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

It was the direct intervention of God that allowed Israel to return because God had appointed the King of Persia to rebuild the temple.

³ Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with 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.

King Cyrus misunderstood the greatness of God but that did not stop God from using him to do His will.

⁴ And every survivor, at whatever place he may live, the people of that place are to support him with silver and gold, with equipment and cattle, together with a voluntary offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem

Only a remnant of the captives, less than 50,000, will make their way back to Judah but the king proclaimed that all Jews, wherever they were, should help them.

Verses 5 - 11

⁵ Then the heads of fathers’ *households* of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites rose up, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem. ⁶ And all of those around them encouraged them with articles of silver, with gold, with equipment, cattle, and with valuables, aside from everything that was given as a voluntary offering. 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; ⁸ and Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the leader of Judah. ⁹ Now this was their number: thirty gold dishes, a thousand silver dishes, twenty nine duplicates; ¹⁰ thirty gold bowls, 410 silver bowls of a second *kind*, and a thousand other articles. ¹¹ All the articles of gold and silver *totaled* 5,400. Sheshbazzar brought them all up with the exiles who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

⁵ Then the heads of fathers' households of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites rose up, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.

Cyrus' decree was broad enough to include the northern tribes but there is no indication here of any response from the northern tribes. However, we should remember that many of the faithful in the north moved to Judah prior to the destruction of Northern Israel by Assyria.

Two such cases are listed here but there are other examples.

1. See 2 Chron. 11:14 – 17 (930 BC)

¹⁴ For the Levites left their pasture lands and their property and went to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons had excluded them from serving as priests to the Lord. ¹⁵ He set up priests of his own for the high places, for the satyrs and the calves which he had made. ¹⁶ Those from all the tribes of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the Lord God of Israel followed them to Jerusalem, to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers. ¹⁷ They strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam the son of Solomon for three years, for they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years.

This tells us that the Levites from the northern tribes came to Jerusalem to live and those from all the tribes of Israel who sought the Lord followed the Levites.

2. See 2 Chron. 15:8 – 9 (896 – 875 BC)

⁸ Now when Asa heard these words and the prophecy which Azariah the son of Oded the prophet spoke, he took courage and removed the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and from the cities which he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim. He then restored the altar of the Lord which was in front of the porch of the Lord. ⁹ And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who resided with them, for many defected to him from Israel when they saw that the Lord his God was with him.

In both cases Levites and others left the Northern Kingdom to live in Judah long before the Northern Kingdom was deported by Assyria. They left the Northern Kingdom because the people had left the Lord by worshipping the golden calves.

In any case, “everyone whose spirit God had stirred” went to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. We know from the Biblical record that reestablishing the city of Jerusalem and building the temple was a difficult task and not for the faint of heart.

⁶ And all of those around them encouraged them with articles of silver, with gold, with equipment, cattle, and with valuables, aside from everything that was given as a voluntary offering.

Those who went felt directed to do so but that doesn't mean those who stayed "home" in Babylon were unfaithful. Those who stayed behind provided for those who were willing and able to go to Jerusalem. People of faith often help missionaries in foreign countries.

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;

Nebuchadnezzar's looted the Temple in 597 B.C. and in 586 B.C. The night Babylon fell, Belshazzar was having a great feast for his lords and he sent for the sacred vessels of the Jewish Temple to drink from them. That was the occasion when a man's hand wrote the doom of Babylon on the wall and the city fell that night. See Daniel 5.

⁸ and Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the leader of Judah.

Sheshbazzar disappears from the Biblical narrative after this brief mention. We don't know if he died during the Journey or if his role after this point wasn't of any importance to the remaining narrative. Others think this was the Babylonian name for Zerubbabel.

⁹ Now this was their number: thirty gold dishes, a thousand silver dishes, twenty nine duplicates; ¹⁰ thirty gold bowls, 410 silver bowls of a second *kind*, and a thousand other articles. ¹¹ All the articles of gold and silver totaled 5,400. Sheshbazzar brought them all up with the exiles who went up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Rebuilding the city of Jerusalem and building the new temple was a monumental job in themselves so it was a blessing from the Lord that many of the articles used in the work of the temple were not lost or melted down for other uses.