

The Bible tells the story of redemption from the beginning to the end. God desires relationship with us. We will be studying Ezra and Nehemiah in this series - these books continue the story of God's redemption of Israel. Let's see how these Old Testament prophets and stories relate and connect to each other - Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel.

Nothing happens by coincidence. Whatever situation you find yourself in is not coincidence. God has a place for us and a path to follow. There is a desire in the hearts of people today to begin again after this time of the pandemic. We feel stuck but yet have a desire to move forward. We, too, can be a people of God to hear and to bring about God's will to the world around us.

From Ezra 1, King Cyrus fulfills the word of Jeremiah and gives the Israelites permission to go and rebuild Jerusalem after being in Babylonian captivity for 70 years. **Read Chapter 1 of Ezra**

Verses 1-3 *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: "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 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.*

King Cyrus acted because of reading God's Word from Jeremiah... **Jeremiah 25:8-12** *"Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words, 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. 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. 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.'*

Before exile...

- Jeremiah's words came long before Israel's captivity.
- Isaiah's words were also given 150 to 200 years before Cyrus' declaration. **Read Isaiah 44:28 - 45:3**
- Jeremiah spoke of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian King, who took God's people into exile. Nebuchadnezzar was the king who put three people into a fiery furnace for worshipping God. After these came out of the fire alive and protected, Nebuchadnezzar called all to worship this true God. **Daniel 3**
- Daniel served under Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel refused to stop worshipping God and was thrown in a den of lions. God protected Daniel. God curses Nebuchadnezzar in his later life and for 7 years was made like an animal. His mind is restored and he praised God. **Daniel 4**
- The Israelites lived in the well-fortified city of Jerusalem before exile. The Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, surrounded Jerusalem and cut off access. Israel stayed in the city for 2 years surrounded by a wall. Disease and plagues broke out and the people were in fear. After 2 years, King Nebuchadnezzar finally broke through the walls and took Israel out and took them into captivity. Exile began for Israel.

Do we feel like we've been in exile after 2 years of pandemic, isolation, confusion, and disappointment? How we proceed from this place matters!

Released from exile...

- After 70 years, the Israelites had become comfortable in exile. Daniel sees that the people are not where they should be and began to pray... **Daniel 9:4-19**
- 100's of years are converging in Ezra 1. The Lord stirred King Cyrus to let Israel return to their home. God can use any person He wants to bring about His will. Sometimes we disagree with the messenger and so are apt to miss Gods' message to us. **Proverbs 21:1** *The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.* He allowed them to return to their land and rebuild... Cyrus was a king that God used to bring Israel back to Jerusalem. It doesn't mean that Cyrus was godly. God can use anyone for His purpose. It's a reminder that God may bring us a message through one we don't desire.
- Israel had become complacent in Babylon. A very small remnant returned to Jerusalem. In captivity, Daniel stayed separate and faithful to the things of God. Toward the end of this exile, Daniel reached out in prayer to God.

Do you sense that the season we have been in is coming to a close? What is God doing? in our church? in the world? God is beginning a new work with His people and with us. This season will not be the focal point any longer. That means coming out of exile and returning to God and what He has called us to. It does matter how we respond. How faithful a God we serve that would remind His people that the exile would not remain! We, today, are not in our final chapter - God gives us promises that are faithful and true.

Two things should become important for us...

1) Desire a love of God's Word. See ourselves in this manual called the Bible and let it become the words that we live by. Let's renew our desire to know and to apply God's Word to our lives. Let us be known as a people that are committed to God.

2) Become a community that prays. Do we forget what it means to pray? We tend to pray and hope but we need to pray and believe with confidence. God wants to hear our prayers. Pray with confidence, conviction, and expectation that God hears and moves on behalf of His people. We know and believe in the one who created it all.

Out of this place of exile came new beginnings for Israel. 70 years they became complacent and yet God didn't want them to remain but to return to His home. Do you feel a call to return? after complacency? given up hope? Daniel confessed his failings. We can too. Stop the blame and come before God and say I no longer want to bear these burdens. Ask God to come and restore our lives. Build our passion for life, for His kingdom, for His Word, and for His purposes.

God, build in us a passion for prayer and for Your Word. Thank You for the promise of redemption!

Have you lost hope that God would use you to bring about His will?

Are you open to hearing God's message for you, when you disagree with the messenger?

What is stirring in you for change? or for return?

What in these prayers of Daniel can you apply to your life?