

# THE RETURN OF THE JEWS

BIBLE TEXT : Ezra 1:1-11; 3:1-13

LESSON 426 Junior Course

**MEMORY VERSE: "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" (Isaiah 1:19).**

## BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

### **Ezra 1:1-11**

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying,

2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah.

3 Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he *is* the God,) which *is* in Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that *is* in Jerusalem.

5 Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all *them* whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem.

6 And all they that *were* about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, beside all *that* was willingly offered.

7 Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar

## Bible References:

### Notes:

#### **In a Strange Land**

Because of disobedience the Children of Israel had been taken captive. Jeremiah the Prophet foretold that this would happen if they did not obey God. He had warned them: "Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, . . . and go not after other gods to serve them, (Jeremiah 25:5, 6). But they did not listen to him as he spoke the Words of the Lord. They had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, into his own country.

We have studied about some of the things, which happened in that heathen land. Daniel was cast into a den of lions because he prayed to the Lord God (**Daniel 6:10** <sup>10</sup> Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. **Daniel 6:16** <sup>16</sup> Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast *him* into the den of lions. *Now* the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.). We remember that the angel shut the lions' mouths and Daniel was delivered (**Daniel 6:22** <sup>22</sup> My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.). We have read about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego who refused to worship a golden image. They were bound and cast into a fiery furnace but God protected them (**Daniel 3:21** <sup>21</sup> Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their *other* garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.). The three Hebrews came out of the furnace, loosed, and without "an hair of their head singed," and without "the smell of fire" (**Daniel 3:27** <sup>27</sup> And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.). The Babylonians had to acknowledge the true God "because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (Daniel 3:29).

#### **Prophecy**

For seventy years the Children of Israel had been captives, just as Jeremiah had prophesied. At the end of that time, God stirred up the heart of King Cyrus, who ruled all the known kingdoms of the earth at that time. Cyrus did as the Lord had put upon his heart. He issued a proclamation which gave full permission for the Children of Israel to return to Jerusalem. Cyrus said that God had "charged" him to build a "house" for the Lord in Jerusalem. The first house of God, or temple, or church, had been built by Solomon, David's son. It had been a beautiful place of worship, and God had met with the Children of Israel there. That place of worship and sacrifice was destroyed and the wall was broken down when the Children of Israel were captured (**2 Chronicles 36:19** <sup>19</sup> And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.). The Children of

had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods;  
8 Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.  
9 And this *is* the number of them: thirty chargers of gold, a thousand chargers of silver, nine and twenty knives,  
10 Thirty basons of gold, silver basons of a second *sort* four hundred and ten, *and* other vessels a thousand.  
11 All the vessels of gold and of silver *were* five thousand and four hundred. All *these* did Sheshbazzar bring up with *them* of the captivity that were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

### **Ezra 3:1-13**

1 And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel *were* in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.  
2 Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as *it is* written in the law of Moses the man of God.  
3 And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear *was* upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, *even* burnt offerings morning and evening.  
4 They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as *it is* written, and *offered* the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required;  
5 And afterward *offered* the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set

Israel could not properly worship God without the Temple.

When the first Temple was dedicated, Solomon had prayed that God would hear the prayers of the captive people when they turned to Him with all their heart and prayed toward the Promised Land (1 Kings 8:47-49 <sup>47</sup> Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness; <sup>48</sup> And so return unto thee with all their heart, and with all their soul, in the land of their enemies, which led them away captive, and pray unto thee toward their land, which thou gavest unto their fathers, the city which thou hast chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name: <sup>49</sup> Then hear thou their prayer and their supplication in heaven thy dwelling place, and maintain their cause,). An example was Daniel who, as a captive, opened his windows toward Jerusalem when he prayed, and God heard his prayers.

### **A Challenge**

With the decree of Cyrus was the wonderful hope of having the temple worship as God had commanded. Some were ready to answer the call. "Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem." Many wanted to have the privilege of helping to rebuild the Temple. They were ready to go back to the Promised Land where God had led their fathers. Among those who wanted to go to Jerusalem were young people who had been born in Babylon after their parents had been taken there as captives. No doubt they had been told of the wonderful blessings and promises of God. They wanted to serve God and to work for Him. Today there is a call going forth to young people to work for the Lord. Are you one who has answered the call? Are you saved and doing your part for Jesus?

### **Captives**

Others among the Jewish people in captivity were satisfied there. Perhaps they had good homes and good businesses. They were content to remain captives while others returned to the land that flowed with milk and honey. Their choice was to live in a strange land governed by their enemies rather than have the privilege of being among God's people who rebuilt the Temple. Is it not strange that they preferred to live in captivity, subject to the demands of a foreign ruler, rather than have God to be their Lord and Guide? Is it not strange today that some people prefer to be captives of Satan rather than to have salvation and be free from sin? Yet today we find people who have made the choice of serving the enemy of their soul rather than having the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Gifts**

Not only did Cyrus give permission to the Children of Israel to return to Jerusalem, but he also urged his own people and the Jews who remained, to help. They were encouraged to send gifts of silver, gold, and precious things, as well as beasts for the freewill offerings for the House of God. The people were willing to help, just as some people today will give of their time and money to the church even though they are not saved.

### **Holy Vessels**

Cyrus had some things to add to the gifts. He sent back the holy vessels which had been taken from the Temple. At that time about seventy years before, when Nebuchadnezzar had taken the people captive, he had also taken the sacred things from God's House. They were made of silver and of gold, and were not only expensive but they were also holy articles that had been used in worshiping God. Five thousand four hundred vessels of silver and

feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

6 From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not *yet* laid.

7 They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia.

8 Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

9 Then stood Jeshua *with* his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites.

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *he is* good, for his mercy *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout,

of gold had been kept all those years in Babylon, and now they were sent back to Jerusalem with the people who returned.

Do you remember how God punished Belshazzar for mocking God by misusing some of the holy vessels? (Lesson 422.) He knew how God had humbled Nebuchadnezzar, but Belshazzar lifted up himself against the Lord of Heaven. He praised the gods of gold and silver instead of glorifying God "in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways" (**Daniel 5:23** <sup>23</sup> But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose *are* all thy ways, hast thou not glorified:). Against Belshazzar were written these words: "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting." The very same night that he and a thousand of his lords drank wine out of the sacred vessels, Belshazzar was slain and his kingdom was taken by the Medes and Persians.

### **Back to Jerusalem**

There must have been much excitement as the Children of Israel left Babylon to go to their homeland. No account is given in the Bible of the journey to Jerusalem. They must have travelled several hundred miles, but no doubt they forgot the long, hard trip when they reached the city of God's choice. They were taking with them many gifts to build the house of God and to use in the true worship. How happy they must have been, knowing they soon would be able to worship God as He had commanded! What rejoicing there is today when one answers the call of God! There is peace in his heart as he willingly offers his gifts of love and service, of talent and time.

As leaders of the people and in charge of the building were two men: Zerubbabel, a descendant of David, who acted as governor, and Joshua of the house of Aaron, who would be the priest in charge of the worship service. Although these men were probably born in Babylon, they had no doubt studied the service of the Temple; and when the opportunity came, they were willing to offer themselves for the Lord's work.

### **An Altar**

When they reached Jerusalem, an altar was built so the Children of Israel could sacrifice to God. They not only wanted to worship Him, but they also wanted His help and protection from the people of the land. The Children of Israel kept the holy days and the feasts. They sacrificed the offerings according to the Law: the burnt offerings, morning and evening, as well as the continual offerings for all the feast days God had appointed. These were much like the prayers of a Christian today who sets aside a prayer time daily, night and morning, in which to contact and worship God, and his going to the house of God to worship, as well as the continual praise which rises to God from a thankful heart.

### **Cleaning Away the Rubbish**

The people began to gather materials. They hired masons and carpenters. They made plans with the people of Zidon and Tyre to send cedar trees from Lebanon for the building of the house of God. They probably cleared away the rubbish in preparation for the building of the Temple.

When one goes to God in repentance, it is a good thing to clear away the things that would be a hindrance. In order to have a good foundation one will make restitution and repay where he has wronged others. Then he has a good start to build for eternity.

### **Foundation**

when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

How important it is in any kind of building to have a good foundation. Sometimes it takes a long time to build it, but then there is something dependable upon which to build the rest of the house.

Jesus told about two men who each built a house. One dug deep and laid the foundation on a rock. Then a storm came; rains, floods, and the wind could not shake the house because it had a solid foundation. Jesus called this man "a wise man."

Jesus was teaching a spiritual truth. The person who hears God's Word and does it, is likened to the wise man. The second man was probably in a hurry or lazy. He built his house on the sand -- without a foundation. When the storms came, the house fell, and "the ruin of that house was great" (**Luke 6:49** <sup>49</sup> But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.). Jesus said: "Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand" (Matthew 7:26). What kind of foundation do you have for your spiritual house -- for your salvation? Did you build upon Christ Jesus, the sure foundation?

### **Great Joy**

At last came the time when the builders laid the foundation of the Temple. The people gathered to praise and to thank God, "because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever." The priests and the Levites with trumpets and cymbals praised God in music. The singers sang together "in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD." What a time of rejoicing! Some people wept with a loud voice and many shouted for joy. So it is when a person repents, gives his heart to Jesus, and starts to build for eternity. There is much rejoicing, and there are many more blessings ahead.

### **QUESTIONS**

1. Who was Cyrus?
2. Why were the Children of Israel living in Babylon?
3. What caused Cyrus to make a proclamation that the Jews could return to Jerusalem?
4. How many years did the Children of Israel live in captivity in Babylon?
5. Why did they return to Jerusalem?
6. What did they take with them?
7. Who were Zerubbabel and Joshua?
8. What was built in Jerusalem even before the foundation of the Temple?
9. Why did the people offer sacrifices and burnt offerings?
10. How did the people feel when the foundation was laid?