

## Ezra 1:1-11 – Return from Exile

God, by the mouth of Jeremiah the prophet, told the people of Judah that they would be exiled to Babylon and that Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed. Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC. In time, Babylon was also judged and overthrown by the Medes and Persians as God predicted by the prophet Jeremiah. In about 538 BC, Cyrus the Great decreed that the Jewish exiles should return to Judah and Jerusalem and rebuild the house of the Lord, the God of Israel. The book of Ezra starts with the return of a number of exiles to Judah and Jerusalem. It ends with religious reforms made by Ezra who returned to Jerusalem about eighty years after the first return of exiles.

### **Read Ezra 1:1-4.**

Who was Cyrus king of Persia? Cyrus was king from about 559BC to 529BC. Babylon fell in about 539BC and Cyrus became the new ruler of Babylon. The “first year of Cyrus” refers to his first year as ruler over Babylon which began in October of 539BC. What did God stir up Cyrus to do? How did this fulfill the word of God by the mouth of Jeremiah the prophet? (1:1-4)

While Cyrus’ proclamation may have made political sense, the scripture is clear that God stirred up his spirit to make the proclamation. Can God still stir up the spirit of world leaders to do good? Can God stir up the spirit of a world leader to start a war?

What names did Cyrus use for God? What did Cyrus say about God? Do you think Cyrus was a true believer in Yahweh?

What was the primary charge of Cyrus for those exiles who would return to Jerusalem? (1:3)

Did all the Babylonian exiles return to Judah and Jerusalem? Did the proclamation of Cyrus acknowledge that some of the exiles from Judah would remain where they were?

What were the neighbors of the returning Jews expected to do based on Cyrus’ decree? (1:4)

**Read Ezra 1:5-11.**

Once Cyrus' proclamation was made, who took responsibility in leading the exiles back to Judah and Jerusalem? What tribes were involved? (1:5)

Just as God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, God also stirred up the spirit of a number of exiles to return to Judah and Jerusalem? Does this imply that God did not stir up the spirit of some Jews with the result that they stayed where they were? What was the primary objective of those who were to return? (1:5)

Why do you think some Jewish exiles stayed behind besides the fact that God did not stir them to go?

Verse 5 was in response to verse 3 of Cyrus' decree. Verse 6 was in response to verse 4 of Cyrus' decree. Who were the people described by "all who were about them"? Does this strictly refer to Jews who stayed behind or does it also refer to their Gentile neighbors? Remember how the Egyptians supplied the Jews with gold and other supplies for the exodus. Wouldn't it be appropriate if the Babylonians supplied the Jews with gold and other supplies for their return to Judah and Jerusalem so that they could rebuild the temple which the Babylonians had destroyed?

What was Cyrus' monetary contribution to the temple building project? This also fulfilled the word of God spoken in Jeremiah 27:21-22. God said that the temple vessels would be carried off to Babylon but that after a time they would be brought back to Jerusalem. (1:7-8)

Who was Sheshbazzar? How many vessels were turned over to Sheshbazzar? Does it seem like a lot to you? What vessels were conspicuously missing from the list? See 1 Kings 7:48-50. (1:8-11)

What happened to the vessels turned over to Sheshbazzar? (1:11)