

Ezra:

Working together in God's service



Class 1: God set us Free
to work in His Service!



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Title Ezra: Working together in Ecclesial Life

Speaker Jim Styles

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Attachments

Ext

Size

Attachment 1 Ezra Cambridge 2022 Slides

pdf

5.73 MB

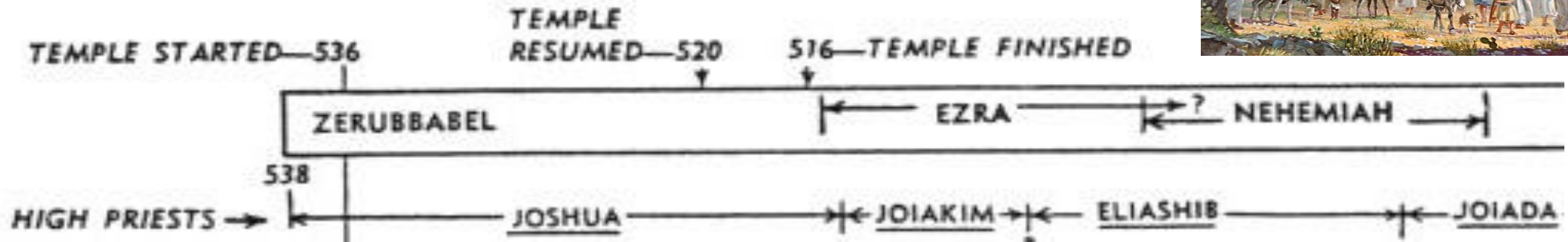
An Exciting Study for Today!

- **Experience brothers & sisters working together** through troubles in ecclesial life, solving problems
- **Practical lessons** in family life & ecclesial life
- **Parallels to Christ's soon return** to restore & build the everlasting household of God
- **Confidence & peace** that grows as we watch the unseen angels working behind the scenes to carry out God's plan in Ezra's day, just like they are today!



**Everyone will find practical
lessons in this study!**

Sequence of Events



- 1) **Cyrus allows exiles to return** with Jeshua & Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-2)
- 2) **Rebuilding the temple**, but then the work stops (Ezra 3-4)
- 3) **Zechariah & Haggai** motivate the finishing of the temple (Ezra 5-6)
- 4) **Ezra Returns** with more exiles (Ezra 7-10)
- 5) **God uses Haman** to convince the Jews to return home (Esther)
- 6) **Nehemiah builds the walls** of Jerusalem
- 7) **Malachi**, then time between the Testaments

2 Sections in the Book of Ezra

Chapters 1-6 Return & building the temple

- Continue 2 Chronicles 36:23
- initial return from captivity
- rebuilding of the temple
- Ezra is still in Babylon (7:1)



Chapters 7-10 involve Ezra himself

- Ezra returns to work in the temple
- Solving the marriage with unbelievers problem

Ezra probably returned as soon
as the temple was finished



Purpose of the Book of Ezra



1) God is faithful
– He will
restore Israel



2) God will build His house
(both physical & spiritual)



**3) Illustrates the
cost of Unity**



**4) Warnings about
marriages with
unbelievers**

The Reason for the 70-year captivity

2 Chronicles 36:15-21

15 And **the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers,** rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. 16 **But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.**

17 **Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans,** who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand. 18 And **all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon.** 19 Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. 20 **And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia,** 21 **to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah,**

God tried so many times and ways to change the hearts of His people, but they would not

The good and bad figs

Jeremiah 24

The Lord showed me, and there were **two baskets of figs** set before the temple of the Lord, after Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the princes of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon *[Zedekiah is now king]*. 2 **One basket had very good figs**, like the figs that are first ripe; and **the other basket had very bad figs which could not be eaten, they were so bad.**

5 "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: **'Like these good figs**, so will I acknowledge those who are carried away captive from Judah, **whom I have sent out of this place for their own good**, into the land of the Chaldeans. 6 **For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land**; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. 7 Then **I will give them a heart to know Me**, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart. *[these people were disciplined to be saved in God's family]*

8 'And **as the bad figs which cannot be eaten, they are so bad**' — surely thus says the Lord — **'so will I give up Zedekiah the king of Judah, his princes, the residue of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt. 9 I will deliver them to trouble into all the kingdoms of the earth, for their harm, to be a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive them. 10 And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence among them, till they are consumed** from the land that I gave to them and their fathers.'"
[these people were rejected and punished!]

God used the captivity to save a remnant

Reasons for the 70-year Captivity

- 1) **Idol worship was so integrated in the people's minds (Ezekiel 14:1-5) *(God's plan worked! Idolatry was abolished)***



1 Now some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. 2 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 3 "Son of man, **these men have set up their idols in their hearts**, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them? 4 "Therefore speak to them, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, 5 "that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols."

Reasons for the 70-year Captivity

- 1) **Idol worship was so integrated in the people's minds (Ezekiel 14:1-5) *(God's plan worked! Idolatry was abolished)***
- 2) **God wanted to save a remnant *(He had promised Abraham)***
- 3) **United Judah & Israel again (prophesied in Ezek 37) *(the power of adversity!) Sad it takes this to bring unity – a warning to us all! ☹***
- 4) **So the land could enjoy its Sabbaths *(Lev 26:43; 2 Chron 36:21)***

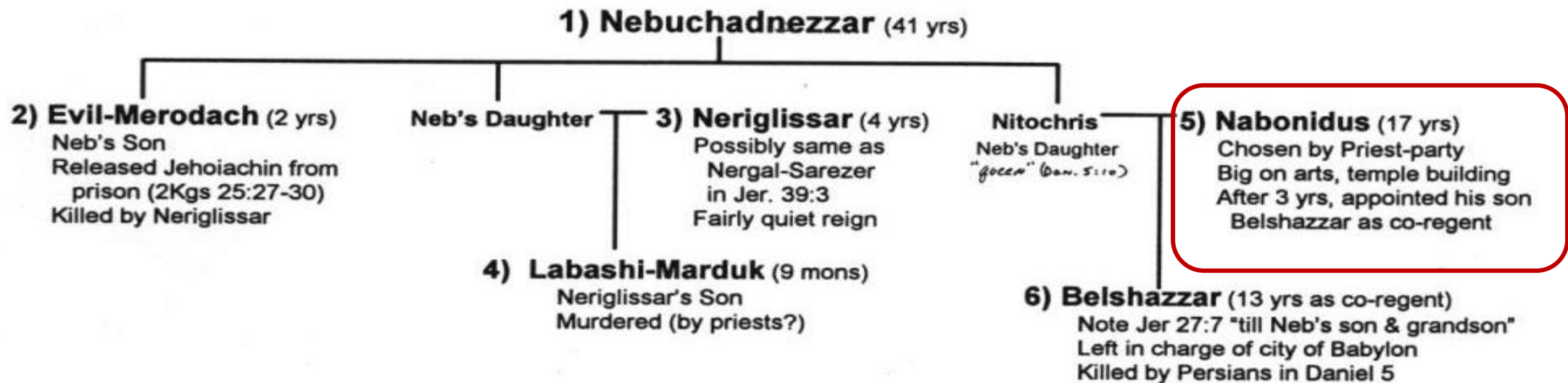


Captivity accomplished God's plan

Political Situation: Looked Hopeless for Jews to Return



- **Nabonidus king of Babylon** traveled a lot and sent foreign gods back to Babylon
- **He left Belshazzar (Nabonidus' son) in charge** (Dan 5)
- **He built temples for these gods** so they would protect his empire.
- **This really upset the Babylonian** priests and people!



Political Situation: Looked Hopeless for Jews to Return

- **Cyrus entered Babylon** without a battle & liberated city
- **Different Strategies:** Babylonians exiled people. Persians left people and incorporated existing governments & people.
- **God changed everything** in a moment of time



Similar situation to our day: No angelic visits, No spirit gifts – Yet God still working in the nations for His people!

The Lesson for Us!



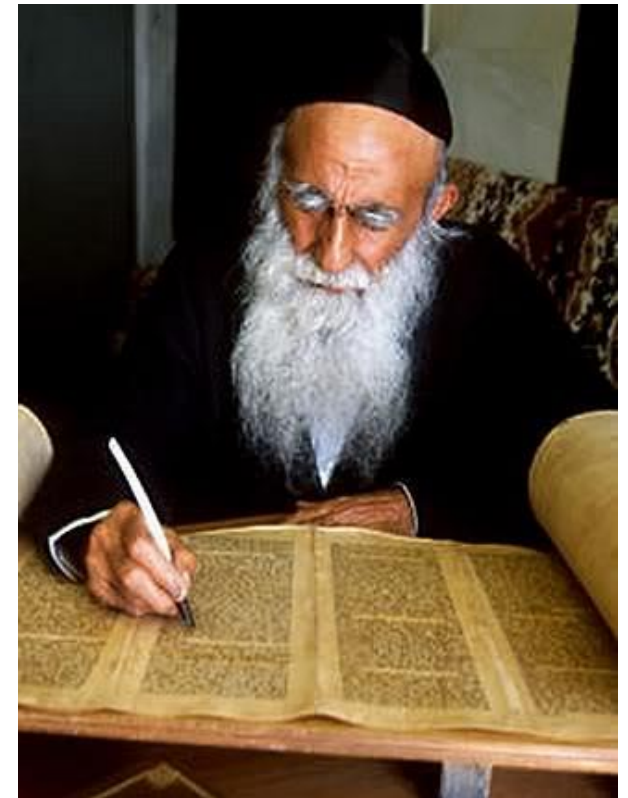
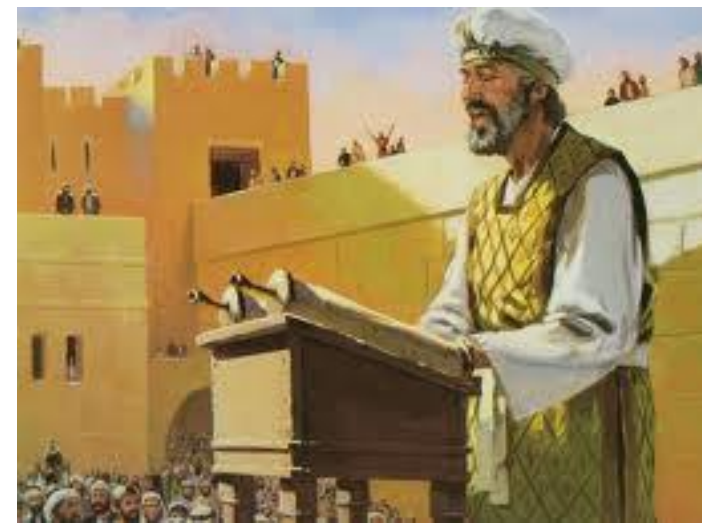
- **Events of the last days** can change & happen fast!
- **We need to watch always, & be ready always:** *“you also be ready, for the son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect”* (Mat 24:44)
- **The angels are working tirelessly today** to prepare for the Day of the Lord – they will get it done on time!

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. (1 Thess 5:4-6)

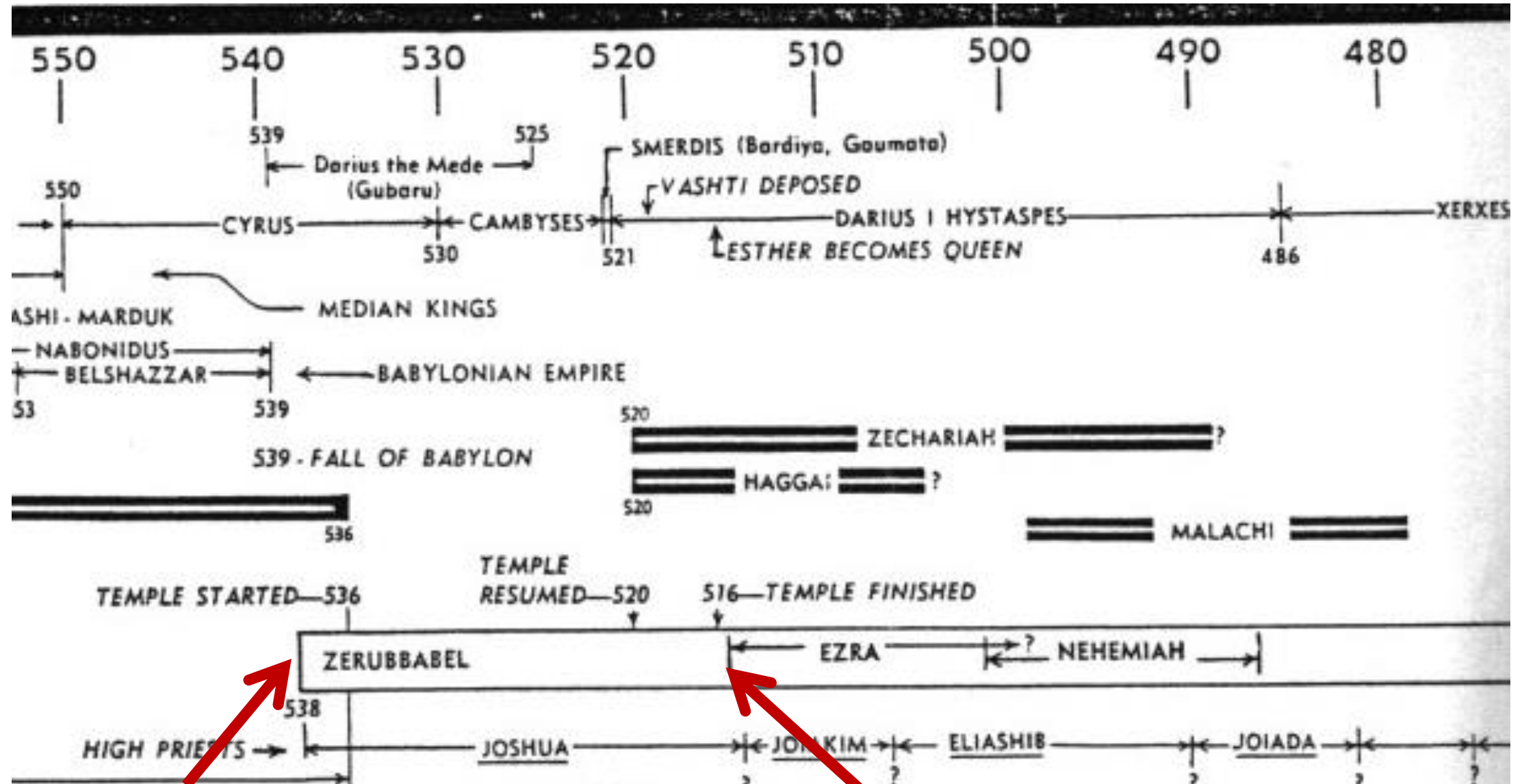
Author of the Book of Ezra

- **Ezra:** note his use of “I”, “me” (8:15, etc.)
- Earlier information was probably compiled later by Ezra
- Clear sections of Hebrew & Aramaic:
 - Hebrew: 1:1 – 4:7
 - Aramaic: 4:8 – 6:18
 - Hebrew: 6:19 – 7:11
 - Aramaic: 7:12-26
 - Hebrew: 7:27 – end

Probably switches because
book was compiled by Ezra



Time Line for Ezra



Book of Ezra starts here

Ezra returns here

Darius the Mede

Daniel 5:30-31

30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

Daniel 6:1-2

1 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; 2 and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one. *[then Daniel in lions' den]*

Daniel 6:28

28 So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

This was the beginning of the Medo-Persian kingdom.

After 2 years Darius died. Cyrus' daughter had married Darius' son, so Cyrus took over the kingdom

God doesn't just predict the future,
He makes it happen!

Ezra 1:1-4 (NKJV)

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, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying,

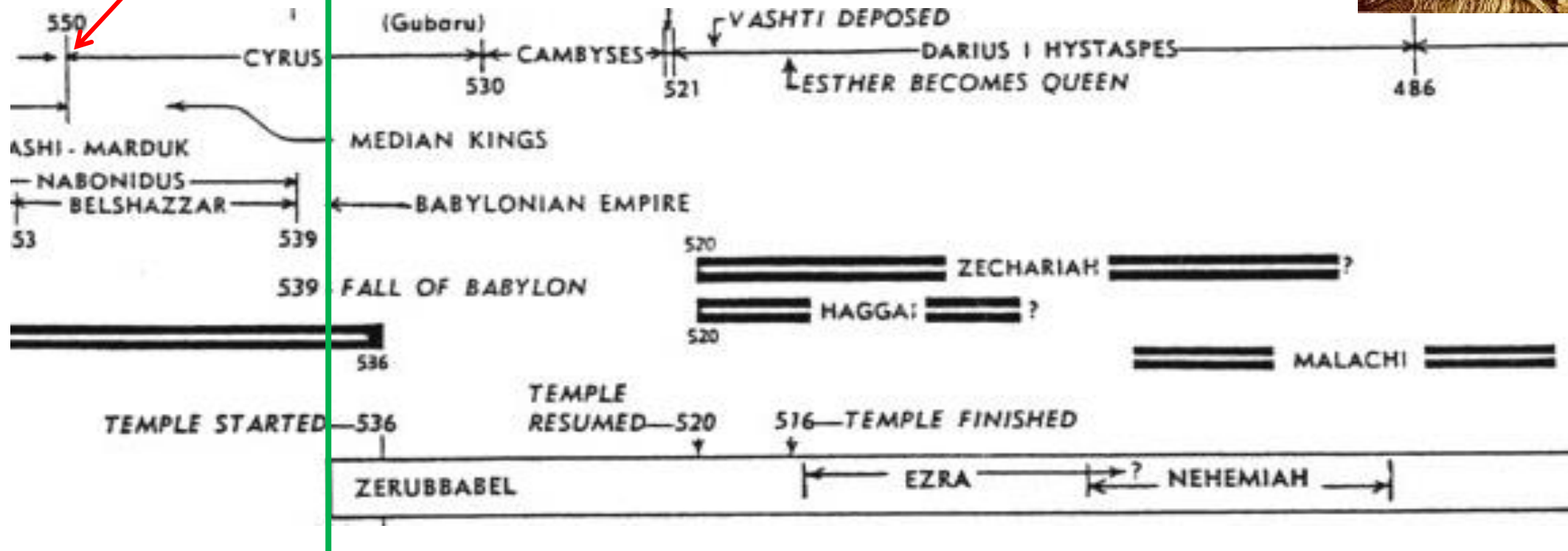
2 Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:

All the kingdoms of the earth the Lord God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. 3 Who is among you of all His people? **May 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 God), which is in Jerusalem.** 4 And whoever is left in any place where he dwells, let the men of his place help him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, besides the freewill offerings for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

God offered everyone to be involved

The First Year of Cyrus (1:1)

- The 1st year Persia took over Babylon and Cyrus ruled over Babylon
- Cyrus actually became a Persian ruler about 10 years earlier



God predicted He would raise up Cyrus

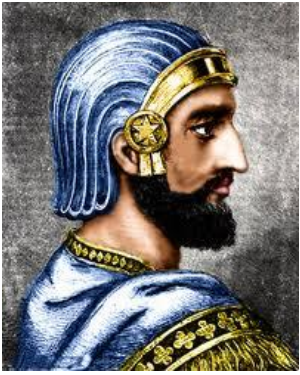
Isaiah 44:28 – 45:5

28 Who says of **Cyrus**, 'He is **My shepherd**, And he shall perform all My pleasure, Saying **to Jerusalem, "You shall be built," And to the temple, "Your foundation shall be laid."**'

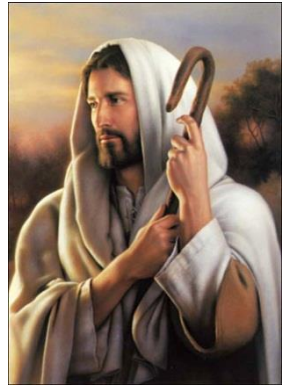
1 "Thus says the Lord to **His anointed**, To **Cyrus**, whose right hand I have held — To subdue nations before him and loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut:

3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, **That you may know that I, the Lord, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel.** 4 For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, **I have even called you by your name; I have named you**, though you have not known Me. 5 I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me.

This was predicted over 100 years earlier!



Cyrus as a type of Christ



- God's shepherd (Isa 44:28)
- God's anointed (Isa 45:1)
- Illustrated God's ultimate salvation of Israel through God's Son
- This is a study in itself.... Our goal is to focus on lessons from family & ecclesial issues of Ezra's time

God is faithful. He promised to save and will keep His promise. He provided Jesus because He loves us and wants us in His family

God used Unbelieving Rulers during the Captivity to Illustrate His Redemptive Plan

- **Cyrus** (represented Christ)
- **King Ahaseurus** (represented God)
 - Mordecai (represented Christ)
 - Esther (represented God's faithful remnant)



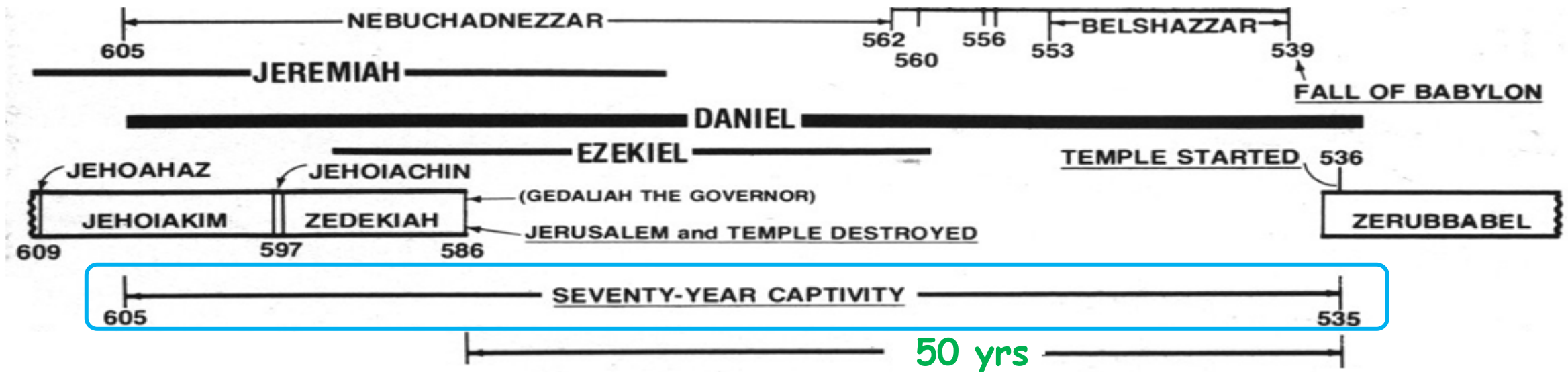
The kingdom of Israel didn't exist during this period

Jeremiah's Prophecies about the 70 Years



Jer 25:11-14 after 70 yrs God will punish Babylon

Jer 29:10-14 after 70 years God will bring Jews back and give them a future with peace and hope



God's Unconditional Promise

Jeremiah 29:10-14

10 For thus says the LORD: *After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place.* 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, *thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

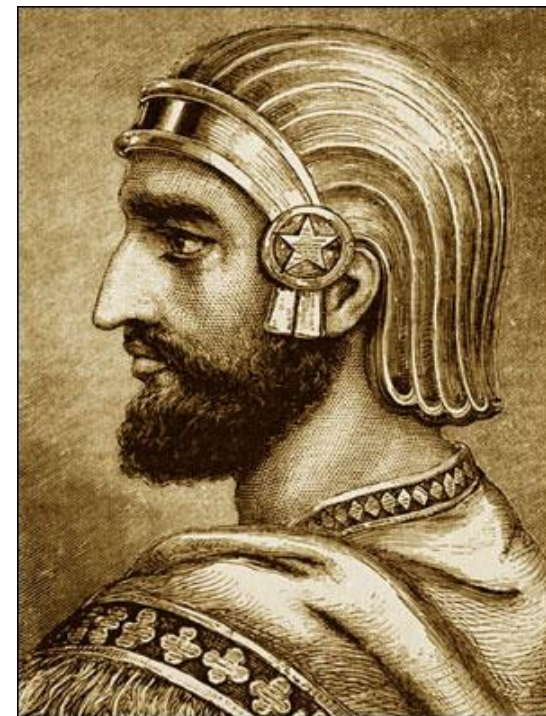
12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And *you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*

14 I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

God promised to get this done!



Cyrus' Decree was recorded



- **Put it in writing:** worth noting because this was really important later in 6:1-3
- **It was all of God:**
 - Freedom of the Jews from captivity
 - Opportunity to build God's house in Jerusalem

It's good to reflect daily on our freedom in Christ
& the opportunities we have to work in God's family

Cyrus learned a key Lesson:
**The God of Heaven has
given me all kingdoms (v.2)**



- **Same lesson God taught Nebuchadnezzar** by Daniel. Maybe Daniel worked with Cyrus.
- **God wanted all foreign nations** to realize that He had allowed other nations to take Jews captive – not that their gods had triumphed over Yahweh!
- **Build Him a house:** Note that the house is 1st priority! The Jews' freedom is a result of God wanted His house built!

**This must be a priority in our lives &
ecclesias too – build a house unto our God**

Now it's time to Act!

Ezra 1:5-6

5 Then the heads of the fathers' houses of **Judah and Benjamin**, and the priests and the Levites, with **all whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.**

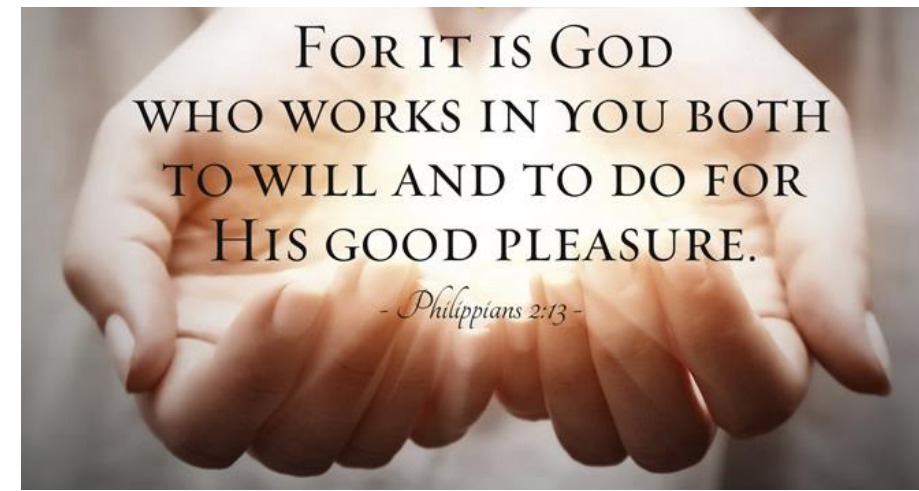
6 And all those who were around them encouraged them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered.

God motivated so many to get involved

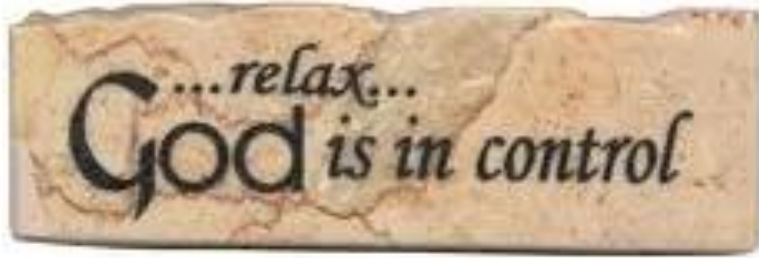
God can stir up our spirits to accomplish His will

- **Ezra 1:5** with **all whose spirits God had moved**, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.
- Many times this is done through the reading of our Bibles
- How do we know that **this is not limited to Bible reading?**
- **Ezra 1:1** the Lord stirred up the spirit of **Cyrus** king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom
- **Ezra 7:27** Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, **who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart**, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem

The Angels are still active today stirring up our spirits to get involved in God's work



God was in complete control



Had Cyrus' decree put in writing
God Stirred up the Spirit

Hag 1:14 ***LORD stirred up the spirit*** of Zerubbabel, Joshua and all the remnant to go and work on His house

Ex 35:21 ***LORD stirred up spirits and hearts*** of everyone to bring supplies

Jer 51:11 ***LORD has raised up the spirit*** of the kings of the Medes

Ezra 7:27 Blessed be the Lord God of our fathers, who has ***put such a thing as this in the king's heart,*** to beautify the house of the Lord

Neh 2:12 I told no one ***what my God had put in my heart*** to do at Jerusalem;

Neh 7:5 ***my God put it into my heart*** to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy.

Thank God daily for initiating our salvation

2 Types of Service:



1. Return to Israel & build

1Cor 12: lots of variety in body of Christ

v.18 God has set members as He pleased

v.24-26 God composed the body that there be no schism

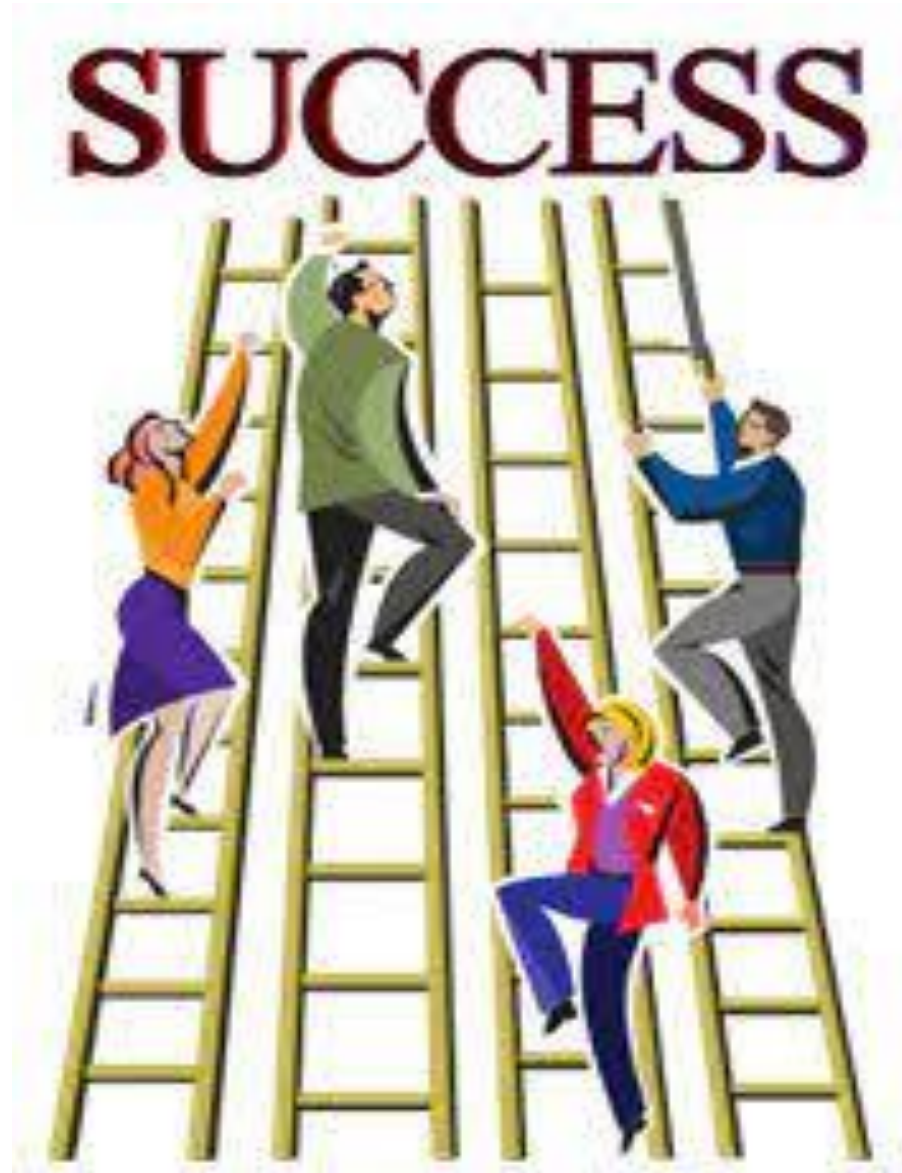
2. Stay put: send money & supplies

Rom 12: he who gives....liberally!



Ecclesial Unity develops when everyone gets involved in whatever capacity you can serve! So many jobs to do! Fun & exciting ecclesias tap into all the talents of its members! Learn to appreciate the help! It's not just about Bible Study

Don't get caught up in today's rat race



Get more involved in your ecclesia and God's family



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LIVE TO GIVE



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A circular arrangement of hands of various skin tones, symbolizing unity and teamwork. The hands are stacked in a circle, with each hand resting on the arm of the person next to it. The skin tones range from light to dark, representing diversity. The background is plain white.

**Unity comes when
everyone is involved
and appreciated!**

God had saved the vessels

Ezra 1:7-11

7 King Cyrus also brought out **the articles of the house of the Lord**, which **Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and put in the temple of his gods**; 8 and Cyrus king of Persia brought them out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and **counted them out to Sheshbazzar [Zerubbabel] the prince of Judah**.

9 This is the number of them: thirty gold platters, one thousand silver platters, twenty-nine knives, 10 thirty gold basins, four hundred and ten silver basins of a similar kind, and one thousand other articles. 11 All the articles of gold and silver were five thousand four hundred. **All these Sheshbazzar took with the captives who were brought from Babylon to Jerusalem.**

God kept His promise – Jer 27:21-22

Vessels of God's House (v.7)

- 1) **Some taken by Nebuchadnezzar** during Jehoiakim's reign (2 Chron 36:7) others taken at end of Zedekiah's (2 Kgs 25:14)
- 2) **God promised** he would bring them back (Jer 27:21-22)
- 3) **Misused by Belshazzar** (Dan 5:2-4)
- 4) **Returned by Cyrus** (Ezra 1:7)



God used the vessels of His house
to represent the people in His house

Sheshbazzar (v.8) = Zerubbabel

more on this in Ezra 5

God wanted a house built



- **Provided a central place** for committed worshippers to meet
- **Continual singing and sacrifices** to keep believers focused on spiritual things
- **Provided an opportunity for the workers** to learn to work together and spiritually grow as the temple was built

Ecclesias provide the same opportunities today for us

But God does not dwell in physical buildings

Acts 7:48-50

48 "However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says:

49 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? 50 Has My hand not made all these things?' (Isa 66:1-2)

Hebrews 9:24-25

24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;

Buildings should help us let God dwell in our hearts

Set free to serve in God's service

- **Gal 5:1, 13-16 Christ has set us free**
 - Don't use freedom for the flesh
 - Through love serve one another
- **Rejoice in our freedom**
 - Use it to build God's house by working in our ecclesias
 - Conduct ourselves like God's children



Freedom brings the
responsibility to
serve the one who
set us free!



God used CoVid to help us grow

- **Provided an opportunity to re-evaluate lives** – what really is important?
- **Taught us to learn new ways & adapt**
- **Showed us we can use technology** to assist many others who cannot attend meetings
- **Allowed us to get to know many others** on Zoom and broaden our perspective on life
- **Taught us to be thankful for what we have** – God can very quickly make it disappear!

**Try to understand what God
was trying to teach us**



Ezra 3:2 - 1st thing to rebuild spiritual lives – Altar

- **Allowed sacrifices (burnt) to restart** – Not that God wanted animals!
- **God used animal sacrifices to explain His training program 4 His children**
 - Animal not a substitute, Not about punishment, not what sinners deserve – this is what Pagans taught, many Jews adopted & most Christians believe
 - That's a very passive understanding – all about God wanted to punish us – Job!
 - was supposed to teach how God can save us in Christ if we participate in God's training program – like Messiah would.
- **Worshipper brings unblemished animal** – represents Messiah
- **Lay hands on animal** – identify with Messiah – Rom 6:4, We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death “in Christ Jesus”
- **Kill animal** – **Not a passive acknowledgement** that sinners deserve to die!
Supposed to be an active participation in Christ's death to Sin – *destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil*
 - **Rom 6:10** For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.
 - **Rom 6:5** If we have been united in a death like his, we shall certainly be united in a resurrection like his

Here's the part most people forget to incorporate!

- **Blood sprinkled around altar** – must give life to God like Messiah will
- **Animal then burned on altar** – God uses trials & suffering to change us
 - If we trust God's involvement – have faith of Jesus: we learn obedience thru what we suffer – just like Christ
- **Smoke ascends as sweet smell (pleasing odor)** b/c in Christ we can appear blameless in God's presence
- **Lesson:** If we are united with Christ in a death like his (take up our cross & follow him, die to sin like Jesus – but not perfectly), God loves us & can change us into His children thru trials of life so we can ascend to God – into immortality

Same reasons we take bread & wine each week! Celebrate God's victory over Sin. Reminds us of our commitment to die with Christ to Sin & God's promise to extend His victory over Sin to us.

Sacrifice taught God's training program

1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)

21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, **leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.** 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, **that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.**

**God expects us to let Him train us like
He trained Jesus His Son**

Sacrifice taught God's training program

Jude 24-25 (ESV)

24 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling *[like cloven footed clean animals]* and to present you blameless *[without blemish (RSV)] [like animals laid upon the altar]* before the presence of his glory with great joy *[like animal ascending as pleasing odor]*, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

God kept His promise – Jer 27:21-22

God wants us involved in His ecclesia

1 Timothy 3:15

I write so **that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself** in *the house of God*, which is the *ecclesia of the living God*, the pillar and ground of the truth.

Let's get building & serve with
love, joy, peace, patience, etc...

Lessons from Today

- God is totally in control of the events of our lives and the world – the angels are very busy!
- God doesn't just predict the future, He has the power to make it happen.
- As God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus and God's people in the past, He can still do this today! Pray for His help!
- As God provided Cyrus, He has provided Jesus to set us free from Sin – free to do His will & be involved in His Family.
- God loves us and is willing to do what it takes to change us into people who live like His Son – but it's up to us to respond!