

Ezra 1:1-11; 2:1-2 and 64-70**Cyrus Helps the Exiles to Return**

¹ In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing:

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 build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. ³ Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. ⁴ And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.”

⁵ Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. ⁶ All their neighbours assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings.

⁷ Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god. ⁸ Cyrus king of Persia had them brought by Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah.

⁹ This was the inventory:

gold dishes	30
silver dishes	1,000
silver pans	29
¹⁰ gold bowls	30
matching silver bowls	410
other articles	1,000

¹¹ In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver. Sheshbazzar brought all these along with the exiles when they came up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

The List of the Exiles Who Returned

2 Now these are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive to Babylon (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to their own town, ² in company with Zerubbabel, Joshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum and Baanah):

⁶⁴ The whole company numbered 42,360, ⁶⁵ besides their 7,337 male and female slaves; and they also had 200 male and female singers. ⁶⁶ They had 736 horses, 245 mules, ⁶⁷ 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys.

⁶⁸ When they arrived at the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, some of the heads of the families gave freewill offerings toward the rebuilding of the house of God on its site. ⁶⁹ According to their ability they gave to the treasury for this work 61,000 darics of gold, 5,000 minas of silver and 100 priestly garments.

⁷⁰ The priests, the Levites, the musicians, the gatekeepers and the temple servants settled in their own towns, along with some of the other people, and the rest of the Israelites settled in their towns

John 2:13-22

Jesus Clears the Temple Courts

¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After

he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

Please have your **Bibles opened** to **Ezra chapter 1 starting at verse 1**

There's an **outline** for you to take **notes**. Let me **pray** first. Let's pray...

Context/Exile

When we **studied Daniel last year** – we learnt that the Israelites from the **tribes of Judah and Benjamin** - were **carried off into exile** in **Babylon** – when **King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon** invaded Jerusalem in **586BC** and **destroyed the temple in Jerusalem** – took all the **silver and gold articles from the temple** – and took many of the families of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin into exile.

[Slide 1-Exile]



Before this **exile** occurred the **prophet Jeremiah** said this in **Jeremiah 25:11-12**:

[Slide-Jeremiah 25:11-12]

¹¹ This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

¹² “But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,” declares the Lord, “and will make it desolate forever”.

And that’s precisely what happened – the people of Judah and Benjamin **lived in exile in Babylon for 70 years**

Then the **Persian Empire** swallowed up the **Babylonian Empire** in **539BC**

And **King Cyrus of Persia** ruled.

Jeremiah also gave **another prophecy** from God before the **exile** – from **Jeremiah 29:10-12**

[Slide-Jeremiah 29:10-12]

¹⁰ This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.” ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you”.

This is an **amazing promise** – isn’t it?

What's **even more amazing** is that the **prophet Isaiah** over 100 years before the time of Cyrus – **mentions Cyrus by name**.

Isaiah 45:13 says this:

[Slide-Isaiah 45:13]

"I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the Lord Almighty."

The Jewish historian Josephus reports that Daniel who was living in Babylon at the time of Cyrus – actually **showed Cyrus this prophecy from Isaiah** – which influenced Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem in the Promised Land of Israel.

That's where we **pick up the story** **written by Ezra** – a Jewish priest - who will return to Jerusalem with the exiles – but we don't meet him until Ezra chapter 7. So – in verses 1 to 3 of Ezra chapter 1 – **King Cyrus** – **fulfils Jeremiah's prophecy** and **allows the Jewish exiles to return** to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Application

For us it means – It **took God 70 years to fulfil that promise**. We shouldn't doubt God's promises. They happen in His timing – not ours!

But before we go any further – it's **worth asking the question**

What does the Jews returning from exile in 538BC **have to do with us in 2025?**

[Slide-Us in Exile]

Well...

- All of us are **in exile – captive to our sin** – until we **repent** and put our **faith** in **Jesus** – for the **forgiveness** of our **sins**
- We are all **in cultural exile** – because we're living in a **Post-Christian Society** - Christians today can feel like exiles in this secular world, where Christian values are no longer followed. We are living in a world where Christian ethics and morals are dismissed or mocked.
- We can also feel like we are **in emotional and spiritual exile** – when we live in a community or nation where there is no fear of God – and when we live in a world that has moved far from God. As we flick on the news there's so much horror, sinful behaviour and moral decay – we begin to ask, what kind of world are we living in?
- We can also be in **social exile** – as **Christians** who are a **minority** in **Australia** – we are often persecuted or marginalized because of our beliefs – **we see this with the cancel culture or woke culture** – **trying to cancel out our Christian beliefs** – for example Christmas and Easter are just seen as holidays and a time to indulge ourselves - and Jesus is put on the shelf!
- We are also still recovering from **the exile we experienced in the time of covid** – and we are in a sense rebuilding and restoring our lives and our church to pre-covid times!

- And of course – we are all **in exile in this fallen broken world** – as we head to **our Promised Land** – in Heaven

So, what can we learn from this **return of the Jews from exile?**

Shows God's Sovereignty and God's Providence (Ezra 1:1-11)

[Slide-1st Point]

1st point – the return from exile shows **God's sovereignty and God's Providence** – verses 1 to 11 of chapter 1

Let's be clear what **God's sovereignty** is:

God's sovereignty *refers to His supreme power and authority over all creation. It encompasses His ability to govern the universe, control events, and fulfill His divine purposes without any hindrance.*

It means God is all-knowing, all-powerful and ever-present.

And **God's providence** means:

God sustains and upholds everything He has made; and He directs all things to achieve His purposes; and He provides all the needs of His creation – daily bread, strength and wisdom.

So, in verse 1 we see ***the Lord moved the heart of King Cyrus*** to make a proclamation for the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem.

This means God moves hearts – even the heart of a pagan King!

It also means God can move the heart of believers and non-believers alike!

Application – is there someone you're praying for **whose heart needs to be softened because they are not doing the will of God** or **someone who is being disobedient to His commands?**

Keep praying! God is faithful.

We also see in verse 5 God ***moved the hearts of the family heads of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and Levites*** – so that they were moved to go up and build the house (the Temple) of the Lord in Jerusalem.

Application – we should not underestimate **how God can move people to do His will.**

As I've said many times **"God is in the miracle business!"**

Application

Perhaps God is calling us and moving our hearts and **we are failing to respond – because we want to stay in our comfort zone?**

It begs the question **how might our hearts be moved towards our family, our church family and our church?**

a. **Towards our family:**

- i. *by being the **spiritual leader** of our **family** at home, through prayer, reading God's Word, Bible study, listening and intentional conversation about spiritual matters*

- ii. *By **helping to restore and rebuild relationships** – especially those broken or fractured relationships where there’s a distance, misunderstanding or apathy*
- iii. *By **Encouraging our family**, children, grandchildren in faith – and **modelling a Christ centred life to them***
- b. **Towards our church family**: Just like the priests and Levites who rose up to rebuild, maybe God is:
 - i. *Prompting us to **serve, support, or show up in a new or renewed way.***
 - ii. *Perhaps God is calling us to **encourage someone** who feels discouraged or disconnected.*
 - iii. *Or nudging us to **contribute generously**—not just financially, but with time, care, and spiritual gifts.*
 - iv. ***Perhaps God’s calling you to prayerfully considering making St. David’s, Toukley, your spiritual home by becoming a member – see the Minister about Membership Classes!***
- c. **Towards the church itself** (God’s Temple, His Body, The Body of Christ):
 - i. *By **praying for spiritual renewal/revival** in our church*
 - ii. *By **modelling peacemaking unity in areas of tension***
 - iii. *By **investing in God-honouring activities**: worship, love, truth, discipleship, evangelism, compassion and justice*

Back to Ezra chapter 1...

And remarkably in verse 7 – by **God’s providence** – all the temple articles that King Nebuchadnezzar had taken from God’s temple 70 years earlier – **have been preserved by God** – and King Cyrus gives them to the exiles to bring them back to Jerusalem.

That’s amazing isn’t it!

Ezra meticulously gives an inventory of these articles in verses 9 and 10.

Application

There are **number of lessons** we can learn from **God's preservation of the temple articles**

- It is the **restoration of what was lost** – these temple articles were holy objects used for worship and sacrifice – **their return is symbolic of restoration and God bringing His people back to worship.**
In the same way – when we come to Jesus – **the relationship we'd lost with God because of our sin is restored**
- It is also a **reversal of defeat and shame** – when King Nebuchadnezzar took the temple articles – **it was a sign of defeat and shame.**
With King Cyrus allowing these temple articles to return – **it is a reversal of that defeat and shame.**
Likewise – when we come to Jesus and are forgiven of our sins – **it's a reversal of the shame sin brings**
- **It also shows worship matters to God** – these temple articles were not just silver and gold objects – **they were set apart for worship.**
And likewise, we are set apart to worship God as His people!
- It also shows that **God ALWAYS provides what we NEED!**
- **Let's praise God for His loving care of us!**

Shows God Cares About Details (Ezra 2:1-67)

[Slide-2nd Point]

2nd point – the return from exile - **shows God cares about details** – verses 1 to 67
of chapter 2

This chapter gives a **comprehensive list of all the people who returned from exile.**
God preserved this long list of names in Ezra 2 **to show that each person mattered to Him.**

It highlights His faithfulness, personal care, and commitment to community and legacy.

These **names represent real people** who responded to God's call to return and rebuild—and **God honoured their faith by recording them.**

It reveals a God who sees, remembers, and values every individual in His redemptive story.

God cares about the detail as well as the big picture!

God also, preserves the names to **show there is continuity from those who were exiled to those who returned from exile.**

God preserves a faithful remnant!

We shouldn't be surprised by that - the **prophet Isaiah** says this in Isaiah 10:22:

Though your people be like the sand by the sea, Israel, only a remnant will return. (Isaiah 10:22)

Application

For us it means – **God has a plan for each one of us – and the details of our lives matter to Him!**

It also means – just like the people named in Ezra chapter 2 – **had a part to play in God's restoration plan for Jerusalem** - In Revelation 20:15, the names in the Book of Life signify those who have a place in God's eternal kingdom and salvation.

As believers – our name is written in the Book of Life!

It also shows – as believers – we are part of that faithful remnant

Notice too in verse 62 – those who could not verify their identity **were excluded from the priesthood.**

God cares about details and good order!

Similarly, only those **whose identity is in Christ and are a new creation** (2 Corinthians 5:17) **will be allowed in Heaven!**

And this dilemma of some who couldn't verify their identity brings into play in verse 63 - the **sacred objects of the Urim and Thummim** used by the high priest in the Old Testament to discern God's will. These were **special stones** kept in the **breastplate of judgment** worn by the high priest (see Exodus 28:30). **The exact method of how these special stones worked is unclear, but they were used to receive yes/no answers and clear directions from God.**

Here again **we see God's attention to detail to assist the priest in the decision-making process**

Application

For us – we don't need these special stones – we have Jesus – as the cornerstone of our faith – and we also have the Holy Spirit living inside us to guide us in all truth – reminding us of Jesus' words – and helping us to discern. And of course, we have God's Word as a lamp to our feet (Psalm 119:105)

Requires a Response From God's People (Ezra 2:68-70)

[Slide-3rd Point]

3rd point – the return from exile – **requires a response from God's people** – see verses 68 to 70...

We see that *some of the heads of family gave freewill offerings toward the rebuilding of the house of God*

The **people give freely, generously and sacrificially** in a devoted and unified manner. It showed that **they had a heart for worship and devotion to the Lord**. They **showed their priority was to worship and to serve the Lord!**

Application

In what ways can we, like the exiles, **give sacrificially to support the work of God today?**

Well...

- i) **Give our time** – to serve in ministry, visit the lonely/sick, or help with church events/services

ii) **Give our talents/skills** - God has gifted each of us with unique talents.

Whether it's music, hospitality, teaching, administration, or tech—offering these in service to God's work is a beautiful sacrifice.

iii) **Give hospitality and resources** - Sharing our home, food, or possessions with others in the church family or wider community reflects the generosity of God. Hospitality opens the door for fellowship and discipleship. Other examples might be – hosting a Bible study, providing meals to those who are sick...

iv) **Offer up our prayers and intercession** - Faithfully praying for others, the church, and God's mission is often unseen but powerful. It's a sacrifice of time, focus, and heart. Examples: **Committing to a prayer group or prayer buddy, interceding for our church leaders, or adopting a missionary to pray for regularly. Even pray through the church directory!**

v) **Financial Giving**. Just as the exiles gave gold and silver, we can support the church, mission work, and those in need with our finances. Sacrificial giving isn't about the amount but about trusting God with what we have and giving generously, even when it stretches us. Examples: Tithing, supporting missionaries, contributing to church building funds or ministries.

There we have it - **3 lessons from the return from exile:**

- It shows **God's sovereignty and God's providence**
- It shows **God cares about the details**
- It requires **a response from God's people**

Challenge (John 2:13-22)

[Slide-Challenge Heading]

To finish up then I'd like to briefly look at our NT passage – from John 2 – verses 13 to 22 [Please turn there now]

Jesus shows up at the Temple in Jerusalem – it's 500 years since Ezra's time

The Temple has **not only been rebuilt in Ezra's day** – it's had some major enhancements from King Herod just before Jesus' day

And **Jesus discovers in verse 16** – they have ***turned His Father's House [the Temple] into a market place!***

And **Jesus is really angry**

The Jews question Jesus' authority to clean out the temple – verse 18 - as He **overturned tables** -verse 15

The **Jews demand a sign of Jesus authority**

Jesus answers - ***Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.***

The Temple Jesus was referring to was His own body (verse 21)

What we need to realize is that **the Temple in Jerusalem was a sign of God's presence with His people – and the place where the High Priest made sacrifices for sin on behalf of the people**

What Jesus is saying is – We don't need a **physical temple for a high priest to make sacrifices for sin anymore!**

Because **Jesus Himself is the Temple – He is the presence of God - He is also the High Priest** – and **He is also the ultimate once and for all sacrifice for sin**

We need to come to Him – **for forgiveness and eternal life**

We need to come to Him – **our spiritual temple – where He is the cornerstone and we are like spiritual living stones attached to Him.**

The Church is our spiritual home for worship and praise– not for sacrifice!

Let me finish with a **challenge**

In Matthew's version of the cleansing of the Temple

Jesus said: "***My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers!***" (Matthew 21:13)

[Slide-Challenge]

What do we think Jesus might say – if He came into our House (here at church or at home) – what needs to be restored to make our House what it should be?

We asked this same question in our Bible Study

My answer was – His House needs to be a **House of Prayer**, a **House of Bible Reading**, a **House of Bible Study** and a **House of Evangelism** – at the very least.

Perhaps **we could prayerfully consider** – how **we restore Jesus' House** – here at **Toukley?**

Let's pray...

Father God, thank you that you are sovereign in all things and you always provide for your creature. Thank you that you care about the details of our lives as well as the big picture. Help us to think through how we sacrificially give to your work here at Toukley; and help us to be living stones attached to Jesus, the cornerstone, working to restore your House in Toukley. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Benediction (Ephesians 2:21-22)

²¹ In Jesus the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. AMEN