

Babylonian Captivity Ends
Bible Background: Ezra 1; Ezra 2:64-70
Devotional Reading: Amos 5:14-15

Aim for Change (p. 304):

1. **EXAMINE** the rebuilding plan for the Temple in Jerusalem that God gave to King Cyrus
 2. **BELIEVE** and **TRUST** that God provides resources for the tasks God asks us to do
 3. **SHARE** situations in which believers will trust God's provision and act in faith
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The People, Places, and Times (pp. 307-308):

- Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon from 605 – 562 BC
 - He besieged Jerusalem in 597 BC taking many elites as captives
 - Destroyed the city, the Temple and robbed the Temple of all its valuables used in actual worship
- Cyrus, King of Persia from 559 – 530 BC
 - Captured the city of Babylon but instead of taking them captives allowed them to return to their homelands
 - Allowed the Hebrews and those who wanted to join them to rebuild the Temple and its city
 - Cyrus is a heroic figure and messenger of God, but wasn't a worshiper of Yahweh

Sometimes we remember to rely on God's provision and guidance from the start. When have you forgotten to plan with God? What happened? – Question from the In Focus story (Page 304)

Background (p. 308):

- Non-believers mock Christians when witnessing/sharing testimony; Christians mock God's messengers when we ignore the direction from the pastor (*Numbers 15:31; 2 Chronicles 36:16*)
 - Ezra reminds the people that God fulfills His promises (Jeremiah 25:12, *29:10; 2 Peter 3:9*)
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In Depth (pp. 308-309):

1. The Revelation of a Stirred Heart (Ezra 1:1)

- a. Regardless of how long you may be experiencing trials/tribulations, God always promises deliverance – this is where having faith/patience is important
- b. When God wants to change a situation, He'll use whomever He wants, whose hearts are malleable (capable of adaptive change) (*2 Chronicles 36:22*)
- c. Many want an end to suffering, but unwilling to put their personal kingdoms on the line, for "the least of these"
- d. The Lord stirred up the spirit – get up from your complacency; lift up yourself and do something; not only did he declare, but he also put it in writing

How does God stir your heart? Do other's see His spirit stirred in you by your actions and not by words alone?

2. The Proclamation of a Stirred Heart (Ezra 1:2-4)

- a. A challenge directed at the people of God for rebuilding and refreshing
- b. Cyrus's proclamation of all that he had backed by the power of God
- c. Cyrus recognized that the God of heaven charged him to rebuild the Temple even though he was not a believer (*Tuesday – Isaiah 45:1-10*)
- d. The term "Who" isn't about identity but the willingness when God calls you to act
- e. All gave something according to their ability, not to one-up one another, and not just in monetary terms (time, talents, abilities)

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3. *The Response of a Stirred Heart (Ezra 1:5-11)*

- a. (v.5) “Go up to build the house of the Lord” – God always provides a way (2 Kings 24:13)
- b. It’s not about all the material things listed, it’s about the possibility of worshipping God in a space worthy of His glory
- c. Those who have a love for God and patriotism left their comfortability and participated in the rebuilding of the Temple (self)
- d. Cyrus gave what once belonged in the Temple to Sheshbazzar (Zerubbabel – son of Shealtiel), who was the governor of Judah and an ancestor of Christ (Matthew 1:12)
- e. God has a divine order of doing things as a descendant of Jesus, Jeshua, and high priest led the people in the restoration of the Temple (Ezra 3:1-9)

If you see something wrong with God’s house, what can we do collectively to keep it in His standards? If something is wrong with your temple, what do you do to update it? (Psalm 30:2, 147:3; Matthew 6:21, 8:7; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

4. *The Gifts of Stirred Hearts (Ezra 2:64-70)*

- a. The destination is the only focus: Jerusalem and the Temple of God
 - i. The Temple of God is not just the four walls of the building, look in the mirror
 - ii. Many born in Babylon chose to remain there because of comfortability and fear of the unknown
 - iii. When God delivers, offerings should be immediate just to say Thank You
 - iv. Only the faithful are willing to accept life-altering changes when convinced it’s God’s will for their lives

How have you celebrated the end of a long journey, or a long-anticipated journey? Do you remain in your comfort zone or are you willing to step outside the box? (Proverbs 9:10; 1 John 4:18)

Discuss the Meaning (p. 309):

1. Why did the Temple need to be rebuilt with so much grandeur? Why do we even today want to beautify our sanctuaries?
2. Why do you think God thought it was so important not to send the captives out empty-handed? What does this reveal about God?