

## City of God Part 1 - "A People unto God" (4-12-26)

**Introduction:** Overview of series, key themes, timeline, and then start the story

### Series Overview: Study of Ezra and Nehemiah

- 2 Books about 3 main Waves of Exiles returning
- 3 key leaders of each wave -1st leader Zerubbabel, then Ezra, finally Nehemiah (with Ezra involved)

### Key Themes

- **Temple** (Where God meets with us) - embracing what God is building and doing now, let go of expectations
- **People** (Who we are as God's people) - coming out from another culture that we are too intertwined with
- **City** (How we live as the people of God) - set apart, invite the people around us, but oppose the culture

### Timeline: Return from Exile and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem came in 3 waves (approx. 100yrs)

- **Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6):** 1st wave of exiles return, rebuild the altar, lay foundation, and rebuild temple
- **Ezra (Ezra 7-10):** 2nd wave of exiles, Ezra brings reforms, fasting, repenting, and re-dedicating the people
- **Nehemiah (with Ezra):** 3rd wave of exiles, rebuilding of the Wall, the reading of the Law, further reforms

### Consider

- Is this the order you would have arranged things?
- Wasn't Jerusalem sacked and the wall torn down, shouldn't it be rebuilt first to keep the enemies out?
- Was it the wall that protected them?
- Did it work when the city was seized and ultimately sacked and the temple destroyed?
- Why did they fall to their enemies? Lack of a good safety plan?

### 1) Into Captivity - some history prior to Ezra

\*For further reading on the lead up to Babylonian Captivity: 2 Chronicles 36, Book of Jeremiah

#### **2 Chronicles 36:15-16 (ESV)**

[15] The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. [16] But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

**Note:** God's unheeded compassionate warnings, lead to a reforming judgement fulfilled by Nebuchadnezzar.

#### **2 Chronicles 36:19-21 (ESV)**

[19] And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. [20] He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, [21] to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

**Note:** God's principles are important, and effect all of creation. If the people wouldn't keep Sabbath, He would allow the land to. During this exile and sabbath, God is preparing a people and place.

**The coming return from exile:** 70 years is coming to an end, and once again God initiates the movement of His people, fulfilling prophecy of all He has promised . . .

## 2) Ezra Chapter 1 - God Initiates, Cyrus' Decree and Provision, Leaders Rise up and Go

### a) Cyrus is commissioned by God to rebuild the temple and restore Jerusalem to its people

#### Ezra 1:1 (ESV)

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:

**Note:** It is vital that we recognize God's providential hand moving through all of this - warning, judgement through Babylon, now God initiates the return of His people to their land, by stirring up Cyrus to action!

#### Ezra 1:2-4 (ESV)

[2] "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. [3] Whoever 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 rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. [4] And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem."

**Note:** How did Cyrus know God had charged him to do this? In a very powerful and personal way!

Almost **200 years** before Cyrus and the events of Ezra 1, Isaiah writes these words:  
(probably shown to Cyrus by Daniel)

#### Isaiah 44:21-22 (ESV)

[21] Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant; I formed you; you are my servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me. [22] I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.

**Note:** The same God who sent warnings rooted in compassion, who brought tough consequences, and now in mercy He forgives and redeems His people (He'd planned to do this all along).

God's Plan for His people through a King named Cyrus, written 200 years prior . . .

#### Isaiah 44:26 (ESV)

who confirms the word of his servant and fulfills the counsel of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited,' and of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built, and I will raise up their ruins';

#### Isaiah 44:28 (ESV)

who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose'; saying of Jerusalem, 'She shall be built,' and of the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid.'"

#### Isaiah 45:1, 4-5 (ESV)

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed . . . [4] For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know me. [5] I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me

**Note:** Can you imagine seeing your name written out in prophecy like this? Cyrus hears and responds. He not only releases God's people, but funds the project, and encourages others under his rule to do the same.

## b) The people of God are called to rise up and go

### **Ezra 1:5-6 (ESV)**

[5] Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone **whose spirit God had stirred to go** up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. [6] And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered.

**Note:** God initiated this, the timing, the call, and the provision. Yes, by the hands of a pagan King, but we are reliant on none other than God Himself.

- We must not forget this as we are prone to do.
- They will pretty quickly forget as we shall see in the coming weeks.

### **Ezra 1:7-8, 11b (ESV)**

[7] Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. [8] Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. . . [11] all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.

**Note:** Temple vessels were given back to the prince of Judah, Sheshbazzar (Chaldean name of Zerubbabel).

**Conclusion:** How does this Old Testament history have any bearing on the church?

- God is unchanging and we are his people, there is much to learn from those who have gone before.
- God warns in His compassion, judges and refines in His wrath, forgives and redeems in His mercy, and all along the way He calls His people to be set apart unto Him.

There is a New Jerusalem coming, we look for a city who's builder and maker is God . . .

### **Hebrews 11:15-16 (ESV)**

[15] If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. [16] But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

While we have no lasting city here, we are a city on a hill, a people unto God, and a light to the nations . . .

### **Matthew 5:14-16 (ESV)**

[14] You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

**Note:** May we be a set apart people unto God, **responsive** to Him, and **reliant** upon Him alone!