

Like I Said

Ezra 1:1-4

Pierre Cannings

I. I Told You vs. 1-2

- a. Cyrus King of Persia
 - i. Cyrus' defeat of Babylon and the Babylonian empire, along with his previous conquests, brought the whole of the Near East within the Persian empire with the exception of Egypt
- b. Fulfilled - to be accomplished Jeremiah 25:12; 29:10-12
 - i. The rise of Cyrus is one of the most amazing fulfillments of biblical prophecy. Identifying him by name, Isaiah prophesied the coming of Cyrus almost 200 years before he came to power
 - ii. Cyrus's decision did not just happen. At a specific time, 538 B.C., the Lord caused Cyrus to act in a way that fulfilled specific prophecies. Jeremiah (25:11-12; 29:10) had predicted that the Babylonian captivity would last for seventy years and then God would fulfill his "gracious promise to bring [them] back to this place." The Hebrew word used in Ezra 1:1 suggests that the author was also familiar with Jer 51:1, 11 and the remarkable prophecies of Isa 41:2, 25; 44:28; 45:1, 13.
 - iii. As noted in the Introduction, the author of Ezra-Nehemiah understood this as a fulfillment of prophecy, but not necessarily a complete fulfillment. Judah was not completely restored (Jer 29:14; 30:18-21), the Jews did not have their own king (Jer 30:8-9), the palace was not rebuilt (Jer 30:18), and Israel did not rule over other nations (Isa 45:14; 49:22-23)
- c. Stirred the Spirit -
 - i. Spirit - **breath** which supports life
 - 1. Designation for that aspect of existence, human or otherwise, which is noncorporeal and immaterial.
 - 2. A clear case of the parallel (synonymous) use of soul and spirit (as in Jb 7:11; Is 26:9) is in Mary's *Magnificat*. She says, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Lk 1:46, 47, NKJV). Rather than divide the two as "parts," some have suggested man *has* a spirit, he *is* a soul.
 - ii. Stirred - to **excite, put into motion, start to work**
 - 1. The text notes that it was Yahweh who עִוֵּר "awakened" ("stirred up") the spirit of Cyrus. Even though the Persian king was the most powerful man on the face of the earth, he was still just a pawn in God's hands, easily manipulated into fulfilling the desires of the Lord. Other postexilic books also reference the work of God to "stir up" the spirit of men, even kings. The Chronicler revealed that "the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, even the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried

them away into exile” (1 Chr 5:26) and Haggai wrote that “the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people” (Hag 1:14).

2. The prophet makes Yahweh address Cyrus directly. Now we find a spirit in man which may be influenced to action by Yahweh, and henceforward that is the method by which God’s will is accomplished among men. Nehemiah’s expression “my God had put in my heart” = moved my spirit (Neh. 2:12)
3. Ezra revealed that the Lord had “turned the heart of the king of Assyria [Darius] toward them [the Jewish remnant] to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel” (6:22). Ezra later recorded the work of the Lord to put it into the heart of Artaxerxes to allow him to return to the promised land (7:27). Nehemiah consistently gave God the credit for his success (cf. Neh 2:20; 6:16), even declaring the Lord responsible for causing Artaxerxes to allow him to return to Judah (cf. Neh 2:4, 8). The very fact that both Ezra and Nehemiah consistently prayed to the Lord demonstrated their belief in His sovereignty.

iii. Proclamation Isaiah Isa 44:28; 45:1-3, 12, 13

1. Lord God of Heaven has given kingdoms
 - a. Even though Cyrus does not truly believe that Yahweh alone was responsible for his success, his words are true nevertheless. The Lord had indeed given him all the kingdoms of the earth. Isa 45:1 informs us that the Lord had raised up Cyrus to “subdue nations” and “loose the loins of kings.” Josephus records that Cyrus was shown the passages from Isaiah that spoke of him and that “an earnest desire and ambition seized upon him to fulfill what was so written”
 - b. Here we have the reflection of the prophetic utterance in Is. 45:1ff. In his own inscription Cyrus attributes his conquest of Babylon to Marduk, its chief deity. But he may have become acquainted with the prophecies above referred to, and then in an edict to the Jews given their God credit for his victories. Such credit would please the Jews, as the aid of Marduk was certainly claimed to placate the Babylonians.
 - c. The introductory formula is followed by a declaration that Yahweh, God of heaven, had given Cyrus all the kingdoms of the earth. Cyrus indeed was able to conquer the known world during his reign. The great Persian king recognized that he was able to accomplish this feat with the aid of the gods. As a result, he pays homage to the God of the Jews. It is at once obvious that Cyrus made use of Jewish scribes as

he wrote his decree. The phrase “God of heaven” in reference to Yahweh, rarely used prior to the exile, becomes popular among the Jews during and after the exile (cf. 5:11, 12; 6:9, 10; 7:12, 21, 23; Neh 1:4, 5; 2:4, 20; Dan 2:18, 19, 37, 44).

- d. At first glance this verse would seem to suggest that Cyrus was a true believer in Yahweh, the God of the Jews. However, Cyrus allowed all foreigners who had been taken captive by the Babylonians to return to their homelands and rebuild their temples. As mentioned earlier, Isa 45:4–5 indicates that Cyrus was used by the Lord even though he did not truly know God. If Cyrus was a true believer in Yahweh, he would not have acknowledged other gods (cf. Isa 45:5).

2. Appointed to Build

- a. In this passage, Yahweh identified Cyrus as His מָשִׁיחַ “anointed,” a title customarily reserved for those who are appointed by God for a special purpose (cf. e.g., 1 Sam 2:10; 2 Sam 23:1; 2 Chr 6:42; Ps 2:2).
- b. Cyrus seized the hands of the statue of the city god, Marduk, and announced that it was his intention to leave local culture and customs undisturbed and to rule the city and the empire as the legitimate successor of the ancient kings of Babylon.
 - a. Such a policy of remarkable tolerance based on a respect for individual people, ethnic groups, other religions, and ancient kingdoms must have seemed amazing to people who had grown accustomed to the governing techniques of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian empires, in which ruthless destruction, the deportation of people, and the forced integration of the conquered into the conqueror’s political system had been common practice.
 - b. Cyrus acknowledged that the Lord had raised him up for a specific purpose, namely, “to build a house for Him in Jerusalem.” Although the word בַּיִת “house” can be used generally of any type of building, here it has a more specific meaning. The reference is to a religious building, i.e., a temple. The original temple in Jerusalem had been built by Solomon. That temple had been burned by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar when they destroyed the city of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (2 Kgs 25:9; 2 Chr 36:19).

iv. In Writing

- 1. The proclamation issued by the king was sent throughout the entire kingdom of Persia. It is likely that several copies of the official proclamation would have been produced. These written proclamations may have taken the form of scrolls (cf. 6:2).

2. These scrolls would have been sent to the various satraps who were then responsible to inform their constituents of the king's commands. Daniel reveals that the kingdom of Persia was made up of 120 satrapies soon after Cyrus took Babylon (Dan 6:1). The postal system of the Persians was world renowned.

II. Now Go vs. 2-4

- a. His people
 - i. God be with Him
 1. The phrase “may his God be with him” was a customary way of wishing someone a safe journey, similar to our term “Godspeed
 - ii. Let Him Go
 1. Jerusalem
 - a. The term “Judah” is used here to identify the geographical location of Jerusalem rather than to differentiate the southern kingdom from the northern. Ezra made no distinction between the two since he commonly used the term “Israel” to describe the remnant of Judah (2:2, 59, 70; 3:1; 4:3; 6:16, 17, 21; 7:7, 10, 11, 13, 28; 8:25, 29, 35; 9:1; 10:1, 2, 5, 10, 25).
 - b. The captive Jews are told to *עָלָה* “go up” to Jerusalem. This term is commonly used throughout the OT to denote a trip to the City of David (e.g., 2 Sam 19:34; 1 Kgs 12:27; 2 Kgs 12:17; Zech 14:17). Because Jerusalem is situated at the top of a mountain, travelers must literally ascend (“go up”) to the city.”
 2. Rebuild
 - a. This decision would result in insecurity, hardship, and suffering as the returnees started a new, precarious community. But they had a purpose: they were concerned that the faith of their community continue. Their faith, decision, and action were of great importance in the continuation of God's plan of redemption, both in providing the Scriptures and in preparing the way for the Redeemer.
- b. Every Survivor
 - i. Support
 1. Let the Men
 - a. The wealthiest people would be most likely to remain for commercial reasons, and they are the ones able to Contribute most
 - b. Those Jews who remained in a position of prosperity were asked to help support those who ventured home. Many Jews were reluctant to leave their new homes. Josephus speculated that many Jews decided not to return because

they did not want to leave their possessions. Finally, Isa 52:11 directly prohibits the Jews who chose to return from touching anything “unclean.” The gifts of Gentiles would certainly seem to qualify as items that would have fallen under this restriction

- c. The phrase “men of his place” is an apparent reference to the neighbors of the Jews who have decided to return to Jerusalem. What is not so clear, however, is the national heritage of these neighbors. One view is that the phrase is a general reference to the Gentile neighbors of the returning Jews (Brockington, 49; Clines, 38; Michaeli, 252). This view is held by Allen (17, 19–21), who envisions this return as a “second exodus.” Accordingly, he sees the assistance provided to the returning exiles by their Gentile neighbors as parallel to the contributions presented to the generation of Moses by the Egyptians (Exod 12:35–36).

- 2. Silver and Gold
- 3. Goods and Cattle
- 4. Freewill Offering

- a. freewill offering” to be taken to the temple. The exact nature of this offering is unknown. It is doubtful that the reference is to money since silver and gold have already been mentioned. It is also unlikely that the reference is to meal or grain offerings since these might have spoiled or rotted prior to the time of sacrifice. The offering probably consisted of a herd of animals to be sacrificed on the rebuilt altar. In 3:5, the same word is used to denote the remnant’s freewill offerings that were burnt on the altar

- ii. For the House of God