

Fact Sheet for **“History in Reverse”**
Ezra 1:1-4

Pastor Bob Singer
01/28/2018

Brief introduction to the book of Ezra, one of the historical books of the OT

1:1 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: 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."

How many of you are familiar with this passage? If you are not you may find that, after this message, it may become one of your favorites.

History is a record of the past. It is a record of what has been. But imagine what it would be like if we could record history in reverse. Instead of only reporting past events we could also record, with total accuracy, specific events that are yet to occur. Think what it would be like if we could know just... one... day... in advance what would happen. We could know what the stock market would do, or where there would be an earthquake or a flood. We could know specifically the when and where of any event. If there was just one news reporter who could do this he would instantly become the most famous news reporter in the world.

Of course this is absolutely impossible for any of us to do. We are locked in the moment of “now.” What has been, even a fraction of a second ago, is in the past and can only be remembered as history. We do not have the ability to see forward.

But the God does have that ability. He sees with absolute clarity what will be. History in reverse, accurately foretelling future events, is easy for Him. But God not only knows the future, He also directs that future according to His will. And there is still more. The God we worship, the God of the Bible, is the only one who can, and ever has been able to do this! The passage we have before us today in Ezra shouts loudly, to those who would listen, as to what our God can do.

Let's take a look at who Cyrus king of Persia was, what was happening with the Jewish people in those days, what God said of Cyrus, and when God said it. Let's first go back in history before Cyrus.

The first three kings of Israel were Saul, then David, then Solomon. At Solomon's death, and because of his sin, the kingdom split in two in 931 B.C. The northern ten tribes were known as Israel, with their capital city of Samaria. The southern two were known as Judah, and kept their capital in Jerusalem. Every king of Israel worshipped idols and inspired Israel to worship idols.

So Israel was defeated in 722 B.C. by Sennacherib of Assyria, and the northern ten tribes were taken into captivity. Isaiah prophesied during this time, along with Hosea and Micah.

Some of the kings of Judah were saved, some were not. Because of their idolatry they were defeated 117 years later, in 605 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Jerusalem and the temple that Solomon built were destroyed. Many died and many were taken to Babylon. Jeremiah prophesied during this time, as did Ezekiel. Daniel was one of the youth taken to Babylon and prophesied there. Toward the end of Daniel's life Babylon was defeated by the Medes and the Persians. That defeat is recorded in Daniel 5. Cyrus was the one who defeated Babylon in October of 539 B.C.

In the first year of his reign (538 B.C.) Cyrus made the proclamation found in Ezra 1. Cyrus's decree was also recorded in the last two verses of 2 Chronicles (36:22-23). Jeremiah did prophesy of the return of the Jewish people to Jerusalem, but without the specifics of Cyrus's proclamation (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10).

However, Isaiah did include specifics (Isaiah 44:24-28; 45:1-7). Under the Holy Spirit's guidance Isaiah referred to Cyrus **by name** almost 200 years before Cyrus made this decree! Isaiah also prophesied what Cyrus would do! Josephus even records Cyrus's decree (*The Antiquities of the Jews*, 11. 1. 1.)

It's easy when speaking of hundreds and thousands of years of biblical history to miss the impact of this. Here is an illustration that should help. Abraham Lincoln died on April 15, 1865. That will be 153 years ago this coming April. Imagine someone, writing *before* the Civil War began, naming a world leader of 2018 by name, and describing the specifics of something that world leader would do!

Accurately telling the future is something God has reserved for Himself and His prophets. The best anyone else can do is to guess (Isaiah 44:6-8).

Here are four ways you can use Ezra 1:1-4 in your own lives.

- 1st** – Be firmly encouraged that what we believe is true.
 - There is no other holy book in the world that can do this.
 - There are no other religions in the world that can do this.
 - There is no other faith in the world that is valid.
 - The God of the Bible is the only one who can do this!
 - There is only one way to eternal life.

ESV John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

- 2nd** – Trust the infallibility of everything in the Bible.
Live by it! Don't neglect it!

- 3rd** – Don't think that you can logic someone into the kingdom.
God has to be drawing them. However, God may use the logic of this to bring someone He is drawing into the kingdom.

- 4th** – Look forward to God's promise for you who have put your faith in His Son... eternal life!