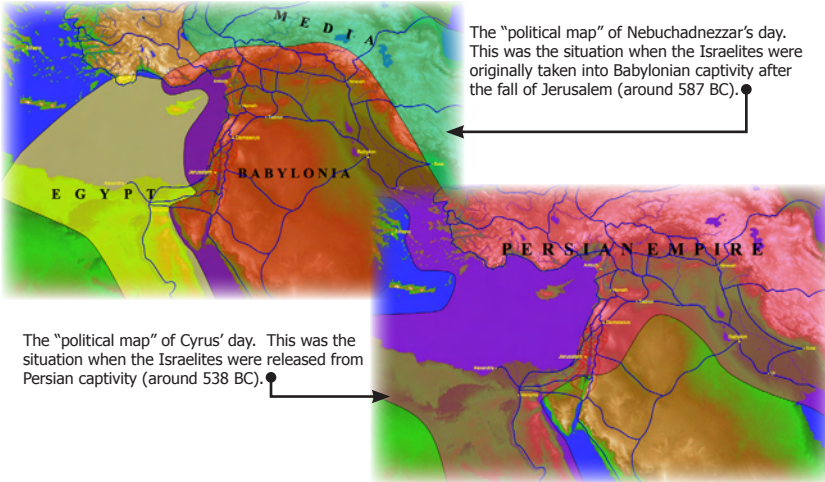


- D) The Persians felt that countries would be more apt to follow them and pay tribute to them if they allowed a measure of self-determination and religious autonomy.\*



- E) Despite this, the clear tenor of Scripture is that God is working all of these national events together for His purposes, that in fact, God is the One "stirring up the spirit of Cyrus" (1:1).
- F) God is stirring restoration in the hearts of His people, even through the means of terrible oppression and captivity which have resulted from sin. God is doing something new! He restores His people as "the God of Heaven" (1:2).

\* In the Cyrus Cylinder, King Cyrus gives credit for his victory over Babylon to the chief god of Babylon, Marduk. Isaiah 45:1-5 adopts this theme but gives Yahweh the credit even though Cyrus does not "know" him. Both statements fit well with the inclusive nature of Zoroastrianism (the chief religion of Persia) in which the chief god, Ahura Mazda, is in continual struggle with the dark forces of the evil god Ahriman. Those gods who are perceived as aiding the Persian king, such as Marduk or Yahweh, would be recognized by the Persians as members of Ahura Mazda's heavenly army of the forces of light. The biblical writer in Ezra presses the same point as Isaiah, not mentioning Ahura Mazda but instead proclaiming Yahweh as the God of heaven. The phrase "God of heaven" also appears in the Elephantine papyri, Jewish documents from Egypt from the end of the fifth century. The fact that Yahweh is here called the God of heaven does not reflect Cyrus's personal beliefs. Similar deference was given to other gods when decrees were made concerning the restoration of their shrines. Sourced from *The IVP Bible Background Commentary on the Old Testament* by John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas (Ezra 1:1-11).

# Restoration

Long Beach Alliance Church • March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008 • Pastor Chris Lankford

**THUS SAYS CYRUS KING OF PERSIA, 'THE LORD, THE GOD OF HEAVEN, HAS GIVEN ME ALL THE KINGDOMS OF THE EARTH AND HE HAS APPOINTED ME TO BUILD HIM A HOUSE IN JERUSALEM, WHICH IS IN JUDAH. ~EZRA 1:2 (NASB)**

## 1) A Quick 1,600 Years Of Jewish History

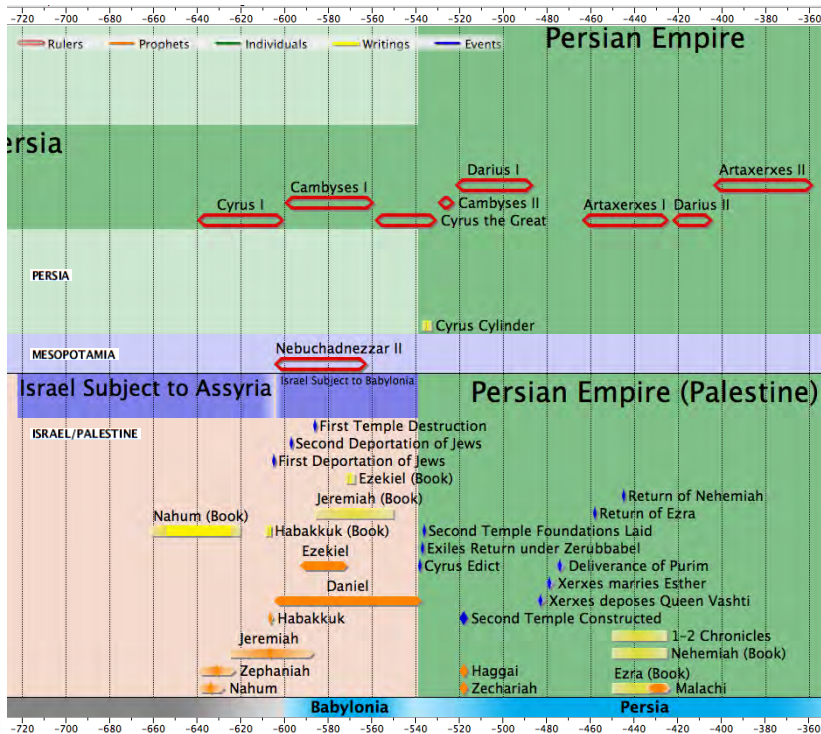
- A) In the Older Testament, God chose the Jews to be His people (Genesis 12:1-3). With God's choice came different responsibilities (e.g. the Law, glorifying God) and purposes (e.g. blessing the nations, Israel as a light to the nations).
- B) Despite God's choice, Israel was constantly rebelling against God and choosing their own way (cf. Numbers 13:27-32; Judges 2:11-13; 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 11:4-9).
- C) Because of Israel's rebellion against God, God used foreign nations to punish Israel and function as "rods of God's divine wrath" (Isaiah 5:26-30, 7:18-19; Hosea 10:10; Amos 6:14; 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 5:26; 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 21:16, 36:17).



- D) A low point for Israel was that their once proud and powerful nation was conquered by foreign nations, and some of the Jews were taken into exile under the Assyrian ruler Tiglath-Pileser III (1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 5:26, 9:1).
- E) Despite this, the Jews continued to rebel against God and go their own way, completely forgetting about God, even to the point of forgetting the Law (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34:14ff).
- F) Finally, Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon, came and ransacked all of Israel, deported most Jews to Babylon, and eventually destroyed Jerusalem and the center of Jewish worship, the Temple (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 36:17-21).

## 2) The Significance Of Ezra & Nehemiah

- A) Once proud Israel is now a broken, occupied, and decimated nation. There is no place for worship in Jerusalem, hope seems completely lost. But never forget God's promises of restoration (note 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 36:21 & Jeremiah 29:10-14)!
- B) Ezra and Nehemiah (originally 1<sup>st</sup> Ezra & 2<sup>nd</sup> Ezra), record the **restoration** and **renovation** of Israel as God's people, and the **rebuilding** of Jerusalem and the Temple of God. The books are structured theologically (not necessarily chronologically) in three movements:
  - i) **Restoration** of the Temple under Sheshbazzar/ Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6).
  - ii) **Restoration** of the Jewish community under Ezra (Ezra 7-10).
  - iii) **Restoration** of the walls/city of Jerusalem under Nehemiah (Nehemiah).
- C) Note that the beginning of Ezra (1:1-3a) is identical to the ending of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 36:22-23). "Cyrus the Great" (see timeline) issues the decree which frees the Jews and makes a way for them to return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1-4).



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This cuneiform-inscribed cylinder contains an account of Cyrus the Great's conquest and restoration of Babylon. In it, Cyrus recounts his policy of restoring the captured deities of other cities to their original homes—a policy which was also extended to the captive Jews (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4).