

Ezra Ch1v1-11 - God's Purposes Always Prevail

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 September 2026

Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0:00] Well, please be turning in your Bibles to Ezra! I'm just going to make some adjustments here. Thank you.

It will be available for you on the table afterwards. I encourage you to read it just to get a bit of a background and to understand the flow of the message of Ezra and Nehemiah.

So do take your copy, one per family, afterwards. Now, just before we read the first chapter, Ezra comes where it does in the Bible.

But just so you know, and I think this is helpful for us, that chronologically speaking, as we move through time, Ezra and Nehemiah really come at the end of the Old Testament in terms of history and God's dealing with his people.

So it takes us up to the exile when God's people are taken into exile and they're returned. So Ezra and Nehemiah is all about the return of God's people back to the land.

[2:00] So that just sets us in the right place. Let's read Ezra chapter 1, verses 1 to 11. In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing.

This is what Cyrus, king of Persia, says. The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them.

And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem. Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and Levites, everyone whose heart God had moved, prepared to go up and build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem.

[3:38] All their neighbours assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings.

Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the Lord, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his God. Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought by Mithridus, the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazar, the prince of Judah. This was the inventory.

Gold dishes, 30. Silver dishes, 1,000. Silver pans, 29. Golden bowls, 30.

Matching silver bowls, 410. And other articles, 1,000. In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver.

[4:45] Sheshbazar brought all these along with the exiles when they came up from Babylon to Jerusalem. Let's pray.

By your word, you brought the world into existence. And by your word, you sustain the world and provide us with all that we have.

And we ask that by your word today, it would speak into our hearts and lives and change us and cause us to depend upon you and worship you.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, looking out on our world, it's difficult to see who is in charge. The great superpowers of the world seem to do as they please, blowing and blustering about their next move. Russia threatens military invasion.

[6:05] Europe seeks economic sanctions. America demands political change. Trump says a united Ireland is on the way.

Meanwhile, China and Iran sit back plotting and planning their next steps. And that's not to mention AI and the thought that AI could wipe out humanity within 10 years.

Listen to the news today and you come away thinking the world is in chaos. Is there anyone in charge?

Well, take a look with me at verse 1. It's a time of great change. It's the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia.

So the balance of power has been shifted from the Babylonian empire to the Persian empire. Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled with an iron fist, has been obliterated by Cyrus, the new superpower king.

[7:16] But despite this change in power, Ezra writes to remind us that God is ultimately in charge.

We can summarize the message like this. Behind the superpowers of the world, God is sovereignly directing the history of the world and all its events until they reach his desired and appointed end. That's a bit of a mouthful, but it's important, so we'll read it again. Behind the superpowers of the world, God is sovereignly directing the history of the world and all of its events until they reach his desired and appointed end.

In other words, God plans and his purposes always prevail. Think of a musical conductor and his orchestra.

With a tip of his baton, the strings are silenced and the trumpets blast. At his direction, the whole symphony moves to its glorious crescendo.

[8:40] Or think of a weaver controlling the loom. She pulls all the colours one by one, introducing different strads and strands.

And at her direction, the tapestry takes shape, moving towards its final design. Well, God is the conductor of this world.

He directs the nations to accomplish his plans. God is the weaver of this world's tapestry.

He controls every event to fulfil his promise. God's purposes always prevail.

And we're going to see three ways in which this is worked out in practice. Here's the first one. God works for the good of his people.

[9:46] God works for the good of his people. Let's go to verse one again. In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfil the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, well, let's take a pause there.

What had God spoken through Jeremiah? Well, keep your finger in Ezra and jump forward to Jeremiah chapter 25.

Now, although we're moving forward, remember, Jeremiah comes before Ezra and Nehemiah in terms of history.

So, Jeremiah chapter 25. here we are reminded of what the Lord had spoken by Jeremiah.

It's about 50 years before Ezra's time. And God is speaking to his people about what will happen.

[10:55] Let's pick it up in verse 8. Therefore, the Lord Almighty says, Because you, that is God's people, have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north, and my servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, declares the Lord, and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations.

verse 11. The whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for 70 years.

And that's what happened. The Babylonians came under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, and they took God's people into exile for 70 years away from their home.

But that's not all God had to say. Jump forward to Jeremiah chapter 29 and verse 10.

So Jeremiah said, you're going to go into exile for 70 years, but there's something more. Verse 10, this is what the Lord said, when the 70 years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.

[12:31] For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Now down to the end of verse 14.

I will gather you from all the nations and the places where I have banished you, declares the Lord, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.

Back to Ezra. So Ezra begins with God's people in exile, but now the 70 years are up.

The Babylonians have gone and Cyrus and Persia are the ruling power. So how is God going to fulfill his promise to bring his people back from exile back to their homeland?

Well, God would do two things. First, the Lord moves the heart of the king. The Lord moves.

[13:42] The heart of the king. Verse one. In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing.

And what was that proclamation? Verse three. That any of God's people among you may go up to Jerusalem. They can return home.

Cyrus may be the new superpower, but in the world, he is God's servant. Look what Cyrus says about himself.

Verse two. This is what Cyrus, king of Persia, says. The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth.

And he, that is God, has appointed me to build a temple for him. Whatever his beliefs in God, it seems Cyrus knows that he is there by God's design.

[14:59] And he only has what he has because God has given it to him. You see, long before Cyrus came to power, even before Cyrus was born, God had set his plan in motion.

Listen to what another prophet Isaiah says. Now take this, Isaiah is speaking about 150 years before Cyrus is born.

and this is what the Lord says. This is what the Lord says. I am the Lord, the maker of all things, who says of Cyrus, he is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please.

He will say of Jerusalem, let it be rebuilt, and of the temple, let its foundations be laid. Isn't that amazing?

150 years before Cyrus came to be, before he was even named, God had said, Cyrus is going to come, and he will accomplish all that I please.

[16:21] You see, Cyrus is God's instrument to fulfill God's purposes. God had promised that he would rescue his people from exile, and nothing is going to stop him.

In order to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of King Cyrus. But not only does the Lord move the heart of King Cyrus, the Lord moves the heart of the people. King Cyrus gave the command, verse 3, any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel.

Now that may seem good news. Cyrus is telling us we can go home. After 70 years, we get to go back.

But remember a whole generation has died. 70 years is a long time. Not many of the people in captivity remember what home was like.

[17:33] Now they're settled. Their kids are in school. They've got work to do. They have homes to live in. Who wants to go back to Jerusalem? It's ruined. It's desolate and broken.

After all, it's a thousand miles away. That's a five month walk. I'm not going back. Are you going? No. Well, just as God had moved Cyrus, now God moves the heart of the people.

Verse five. Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites, those who worked in the temple, everyone whose heart God had moved.

It seems as if God hadn't intervened and if God hadn't given them his desires to move, they would have stayed put.

God had to move their stubborn and reluctant hearts. You see, God is the ultimate superpower. He is the grand conductor of history.

[18:43] He is the master weaver of every event. God had promised that he would rescue his people from exile and that he would bring them home and he will move the heart of the king and he will move the heart of his people.

Nothing will stop him. God works for the good of his people. God's purposes always prevail.

The second, God resides for the joy of his people. He works for the good of the people and he resides for the joy of his people.

Exile meant separation not just from their homeland but also from God. So if they were going to return from exile that meant a joyful return to God.

Look at what Cyrus commanded again. Verse 2. The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah.

[19:59] Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord. End of verse 5. And they can go up and build the house or the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem.

Now why is there so much focus and so much instruction about the temple? Well the temple was a symbol of God's presence.

So God's plan through Cyrus is to rebuild the temple that is broken so that his people may experience his presence once again because God longs to reside with his people.

Notice here the progression of God's presence. It's so encouraging. Look at verse 2. Do you see there in verse 2 we're told that God is the God of heaven.

He is the God of supreme power and absolute purity. You cannot get close to his fearful beauty. He's the God of heaven.

[21 : 18] But verse 3. Do you see it there? He is the God who is where? In Jerusalem.

The creator of the universe is coming close to his creation. he moves from heaven to earth. But much more than that.

Look at the end of verse 3. He is the God who is in Jerusalem and may their God be with them.

God is the God who is with his people. You see God rescues his people so that he might reside with his people.

God commands that the temple be rebuilt so that he can be among his people. This is the kind of God he is. He longs to get close to his people.

[22 : 22] Now of course at this stage the temple hasn't been built. The instructions have just been given go back and rebuild it it presently remains in ruins in Ezra.

But God had made a promise the temple will be rebuilt for their joy. And in case we don't believe it we'll just jump to chapter 6 for a sneaky peek at what's ahead.

Chapter 6 verse 14 the middle of verse 14 they finished the building of the temple according to the command of God of Israel and the decrees of Cyrus and then look at verse 16 then the people of Israel the priests the Levites and all the rest of the exiles celebrated the dedication of the house of God with joy God is the ultimate superpower the conductor of all of history the master weaver of every event he resides for the joy of his people the God of heaven comes down to be with his people

God's purposes always always prevail well third God provides for the needs of his people whoops forgot that third God provides for the needs of his people so the return from exile has begun soon God's people are going to be back in their homeland soon the temple is going to be rebuilt soon their houses are going to be rebuilt but homes and temple is going to cost money right?

Materials aren't going to come for free so where are the readies going to come from? Well we're told in verse 4 and in any locality where survivors may now be living the people are to provide them with silver and gold so verse 6 all their neighbours assisted them with articles of silver and gold whoa it's like they've won the lotto but let's give credit where credit is due no one has set up a go fund me page no rich aunt has died and left an inheritance God who moved the heart of Cyrus and the hearts of the people can also move it seems the wallets of the oppressor he can open up their bank accounts so that they have what they need we could imagine

[25 : 47] God's people packing up all their belongings ready for that long walk home and as they begin their journey the neighbours are rushing out and giving them gifts to help them rebuild!

the temple this is no charity case this is the rich generous provision of God towards his people look at verse 11 in all there were 5400 articles of gold and of silver Sheshbazar brought all these along with the exiles when they came up from Babylon to Jerusalem can you see that God is the grand conductor over all of history he's the master weaver of every event the supreme power who can move the heart of a king and open the wallets of the oppressor God provides for the needs of his people God's purposes always prevail now before we move on we want to just pause a minute and see how this all relates to us because it tells us of a great

God and as we look at our news and hear about all the events in the world surely it should tell us do not fear do not worry God is in control we don't need to worry but there's something much more important than that you see the Bible tells us that we have all been born into a kind of exile we are all spiritually separated from God we are living in a place away from his presence without hope and without a future you see the point is we all need rescued we need set free from our bondage in exile we need to be restored to be the kind of people God created us to be and the good news is God will move heaven and earth to do it in fact his rescue of humanity will be so momentous that God will come in the person of King Jesus a king who only does what pleases God a king who has the desires of the father in his heart for Jesus is the ultimate superpower who enters the world to save us who comes from heaven to earth to be present to save but the world is stubborn and hard

hearted the world has said no to God's king and we too we have all pushed him out we haven't listened to his word and Jesus was rejected and beaten and crucified and as we look at the king and the cross it seems that God's grand rescue has failed but the death of Jesus the king it was all part of God's wonderful plan Acts 4 reminds us indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate the superpower rulers of the day met together with the gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed they did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen you see God is the grand conductor of history the master weaver of every event the death of Jesus was no mistake it was his design for Jesus had to come and die for our sins so that we could experience his presence in us and with us and by his spirit he moves stubborn hearts so that we can return to God so that we could know him and enjoy his presence forever and for all who follow

[30 : 42] King Jesus God has made a great promise to us in Christ that as we journey with him God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus what a big God we have let's go back to Ezra did you notice what else Cyrus did in verse seven moreover King Cyrus brought out all the articles belonging to the temple of the Lord which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem had placed and placed in the temple of his God when Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon he came and defeated

God's people he took all the temple stuff and he put it all into the temple of his God it was his way of saying my God is bigger than your God I win and you lose well here we are 70 years later Babylon is crushed Nebuchadnezzar is defeated God's people return and all the items for the temple go with them in other words God is saying loud and clear I'm bigger than any God I win every time you see to stand against King Jesus means we will lose but if we stand with King Jesus you and

I are on the winning side for Jesus not only died he rose again defeating death and destroying the grave so that whatever we face whatever circumstances we endure he will use it all for our good to bring us to our eternal home the new heavens and the new earth God is the sovereign Lord over all your life he is the grand conductor of history the master weaver of every event and because God wins we too win let's pray oh father you are the sovereign in all affairs of man no powers of death or darkness can thwart your perfect plan all chance and change transcending supreme in time and space you hold your trusting children secure in your embrace our father

God we thank you that you are sovereign over all and that as we trust you you come to be present in our life and you provide us with all that we need as we journey with you until you bring us home thank you thank you thank you amen