

*2 Chronicles 36* is an historical account of the fall of Jerusalem by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon was God's unwitting instrument of judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem for their sin and rebellion. The Babylonians destroyed the city and the temple, and they took what was left of the people in three stages captive in Babylon where they remained for 70 years. All this was told to them in the prophecy of Jeremiah (v. 21). After the 70 years, God sent Cyrus, king of the Medes and the Persians to conquer Babylon and to deliver and restore the Jews to their homeland. *2 Chronicles* concludes with a word about the first year of the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia (vv. 22-23), and the Book of Ezra begins with virtually the same word (*Ezra 1:1-2*). Ezra was a priest and a scribe who was brought back to Israel and who led the people in the ways of the Lord. He also wrote about the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel who was appointed governor of Judea (*Ezra 1:8*). "Sheshbazzar" was the Persian name for Zerubbabel who was a descendant of David and whose name is recorded in the human genealogy of Christ (*Matt. 1:12-13; Luke 3:27*).

*Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther* are the last three history books of the Old Testament (*Joshua–Nehemiah*). They tell us what happened to the Jewish people after the 70-year Babylonian captivity and give details of the three stages of their return to Jerusalem. While in captivity in Babylon, many of the Jews were distressed, desperate, and miserable, longing for their homeland. This is expressed in psalms such as *Psalms 137*. The people were told before their captivity by Jeremiah and during their captivity by Daniel, Obadiah, and Ezekiel that their hope of deliverance and restoration was in the Lord God and a matter of His mercy, not their works. The prophets who encouraged them in this same message upon their return from captivity were Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries who led them in their return, and they both wrote about the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The book of *Ezra* is actually two books, *Ezra 1-6* and *Ezra 7-10*. Between *Ezra 6* and *7* there is a time gap of about 58 years in which the events in the book of *Esther* took place. Then *Ezra 10* is immediately succeeded by the events in the book of *Nehemiah*. Nehemiah was a cupbearer in the court of Artaxerxes, and when we first learn of him he had not yet gone to Jerusalem. But by the providence of God, Nehemiah was appointed governor of Jerusalem, and he supervised and wrote concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls.

**(Ezra 1)** - Here we see that even though Cyrus was a heathen idolater, he was used greatly of the Lord in delivering and restoring the Jews to their home. And even though the Lord brought Cyrus to testify of the greatness of Israel's God, we are told in Isaiah's prophecy that Cyrus was not a true believer (*Isa. 45:1-5*). This is a testimony to God's sovereignty in all things and His working "all things after the counsel of His own will" (*Eph. 1:11*). Cyrus is a great example of the Lord's testimony in *Proverbs 21:1* - "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will." In all this, we can see how that Cyrus was not only God's instrument of restoration for the national Jews to return and rebuild their physical home, but also how he is important as a type of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Deliverer and Restorer of God's spiritual people, the election of grace. Consider how this is so.

(1) Cyrus was purposed and appointed to this position and task before he was even born. In one of the most amazing prophecies of the Bible, the Lord revealed Cyrus's decree to free the Jews to Isaiah. One hundred fifty years before Cyrus lived, the prophet called him by name and gave details of Cyrus's benevolence to the Jews (*Isa. 45:1,4; 41:2-25; 42:6*).

Before the world was created, the Lord Jesus Christ was purposed and appointed of God the Father to be the Savior and Restorer of God's chosen people. According to the everlasting covenant of grace, He was chosen to be the Surety, Substitute, Redeemer, and Preserver of a people chosen by God and given to Him. He agreed to do all that was required to insure their full salvation according to God's justice, mercy, and grace (*Eph. 1:3-11; 2 Tim. 1:9-10; 1 Pet. 1:18-20*).

(2) Cyrus was the subject of Biblical prophecy to be a deliverer and restorer of Israel so that God would accomplish His ultimate purpose of bringing Christ into the world for the salvation of spiritual Israel. In the glory of His Person and the power of His finished work, Christ was also prophesied as the Deliverer and Restorer of God's chosen people (*Isa. 46:9-13*).

(3) Even though Cyrus was not himself a righteous man, God raised him up as an instrument of righteousness, meaning as an instrument of God's judgment against the Babylonians and as an instrument to aid the Jews in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple (*Isa. 45:13*). The Lord Jesus Christ was (and is) a righteous Person (God manifest in the flesh) and was sent of the Father to do judgment and justice in establishing righteousness for His people, God's elect, and insure their salvation unto glory (*Jer. 23:5-6; Rom. 10:4*), and by which to judge the wicked for their sins (*Acts 17:31*). Christ is the builder of the heavenly Jerusalem and the temple of God which is His church. Christ is the Liberator and Restorer of God's elect who are by nature captive to sin.

(4) In *Isaiah 44:28* God identifies Cyrus as "*MY SHEPHERD*" who "*shall perform all MY pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*" The Lord Jesus is identified as the "*Shepherd of Israel*" (*Psa. 80:1*), and as the Shepherd of His people Who will do for them all that is required and provide for them all that they need (*Psa. 23*).

(5) Cyrus's decree releasing the Jewish people, in fulfillment of prophecy, is recorded in *2 Chronicles 36:22-23* and *Ezra 1*, and this was certainly good news to the Jews. God's decree of the salvation of His people by Christ is proclaimed in the preaching of the Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace based on the blood and righteousness of Christ (*Isa. 61; Luke 4:16-21; Rom. 1:16-17*).

(6) King Cyrus actively assisted the Jews in rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem under Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. Cyrus restored the temple treasures to Jerusalem and allowed building expenses to be paid from the royal treasury (*Ezra 1:4-11; 6:4-5*). Cyrus's beneficence helped to restart the temple worship practices that had languished during the 70 years of the Jews' captivity.

Christ is not only the Savior and Restorer of His people, but also the Provider and Preserver of His people. We who are saved by His grace persevere in His grace because He preserves us and provides all that we need to bring us unto glory (*2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 7:24-25; Jude 24-25*).

(7) In *Isaiah 45:1*, Cyrus is called God's "*anointed*" who is upheld by the Lord to conquer nations, defeat kings, and "*to open before him the two leaved gates*" which cannot be shut against him. This means that no obstacle could prevent his victory in doing God's work. Christ was (and is) God's true anointed (Messiah), who has conquered sin, Satan, and the law to open the way of salvation for all His people. And He cannot be defeated. He is the mighty Conqueror and Restorer of God's people (*Rom. 8:34-39*).