

Ezra 1 — The Word Fulfilled — Cyrus's Decree, the Stirred Spirit, the Freewill Return, and the Vessels Come Home

Ezra 1: in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia the seventy years foretold by Jeremiah come due, and the LORD stirs the spirit of a pagan king to decree the rebuilding of his house at Jerusalem; the willing remnant of Judah and Benjamin rises to go up, their neighbors strengthen their hands, and the sacred vessels Nebuchadnezzar had carried off are counted back out of Babylon by Sheshbazzar; Cyrus's decree, 538 BC.

Second Chronicles ends mid-sentence. Literally: the final verses of the Old Testament's historical books break off with Cyrus's proclamation half-spoken — "let him go up" — and then the Hebrew canon stops, as if the scroll ran out before the sentence could finish. Ezra 1 is where that unfinished sentence gets completed, and it opens on a hinge in the history of Israel: the exile is ending. Seventy years earlier, Nebuchadnezzar had burned the temple, stripped its gold, and marched Judah to Babylon in chains. Now a new empire has swallowed the old one, a new king sits where Nebuchadnezzar sat, and the first official act of his reign that scripture bothers to record is an order to send the captives home to rebuild the very house Babylon destroyed.

Hebrew Word Studies

ur (H5782) (וּר) — **to rouse, stir up, awaken, incite vv. 1, 5.** This is the verb the whole chapter turns on, and its genius is that it appears twice for two very different men. In verse 1 the LORD *stirred up* (ur) the spirit of Cyrus the pagan emperor; in verse 5 those who rose to go up were the ones "whose spirit God had raised" — the same verb again, this time for the faithful remnant. Ur is the language of waking: it rouses a sleeper (Song 2:7), rouses a warrior to battle (Isa. 42:13), rouses the very arm of the LORD (Isa. 51:9, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD"). It is not the vocabulary of coercion but of awakening — God does not override the will, He wakes it. And the chapter's theology hangs on the single verb covering both the king who did not know God and the priests who did: the identical divine stirring that moved a Persian to sign a decree moved a Levite to pack for Jerusalem. Providence and piety are the same hand at work. The Lord "worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philip. 2:13) — Persian throne room and Judean village alike.

kalah (H3615) (כָּלָה) — **to be complete, finished, accomplished, fulfilled v. 1.** "That the word of the LORD... might be fulfilled." Kalah means to bring a thing to its full end — to finish it, complete it, use it up entirely. It is the verb of a task carried through to the last stroke: the heavens and earth were "finished" by it (Gen. 2:1–2), a harvest is "ended" by it (Ruth 2:23). Applied here to the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, it makes a quiet but enormous claim: prophecy is not vague hope but a measured quantity that runs to completion on a schedule God keeps. Jeremiah had said seventy years (Jer. 25:11–12; 29:10); Ezra 1 reports the account closed, kalah, paid in full. This is the same conviction Isaiah voiced — "so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth... it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please" (Isa. 55:11) — and the same the Lord gave the latter-day Church: "whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same" and "shall all be fulfilled" (D&C 1:38). A God who finishes His sentences can be trusted with your unfinished ones.

nedabah (H5071) (נְדָבָה) — **freewill offering, voluntary gift, spontaneous generosity v. 4.** Nedabah is the freewill offering — the gift the law never demanded. Its root, nadab, means to volunteer, to offer oneself willingly; it is the word for the people who "willingly offered themselves" for battle in Deborah's song (Judg. 5:2, 9) and the offering brought "with a willing heart" for the tabernacle (Ex. 35:29). It stands in deliberate contrast to the commanded sacrifices: a nedabah is measured not by obligation but by love. That the rebuilding of the second temple is launched on a nedabah tells you what kind of house it is meant to be — one whose foundations rest on desire, not decree. The exiles who stayed behind could have discharged any legal duty and kept the rest; instead they are invited to give beyond it. This is the theology of consecration in a single word: "every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7). The Lord builds His kingdom the same way in every age — "if ye have desires to serve God ye are called to the work" (D&C 4:3). The gate to Zion, and the offering that builds it, both open the same way: willingly.

ruach (H7307) (רוּחַ) — **spirit, breath, wind — the inner animating self vv. 1, 5.** Ruach is one of the deepest words in the Hebrew Bible — breath, wind, spirit all at once, the invisible moving thing. It is the ruach of God that hovered over the waters at creation (Gen. 1:2) and the breath the LORD breathes into dust to make it a living soul. In Ezra 1 it is the ruach — the spirit — of Cyrus that God stirs (v. 1) and the ruach of the remnant that God raises (v. 5). The chapter locates the action of grace precisely where it belongs: not on the surface of events but in the spirit, the inner animating self of a man. God does not merely arrange the politics; He moves the ruach beneath the politics. And because ruach is also wind, there is a quiet echo of

how the Lord described the workings of the Spirit to Nicodemus: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh... so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Cyrus felt a wind he could not name. The exiles felt it and knew its source. The same ruach that woke a Persian to build a temple is the Spirit that "beareth witness with our spirit" (Rom. 8:16) still — God reaching past circumstance to the breath of a person and setting it in motion toward Him.

keliy (H3627) (כֵּל, כֵּלָּה) — vessel, article, implement — a thing made and set apart for use vv. 7, 10, 11. Keliy is a wonderfully ordinary word — it means an implement, an article, a vessel, anything crafted for a purpose, from a farm tool to a weapon to a sacred temple basin. What makes the temple keliy holy is not the substance (gold and silver are just metal) but the setting-apart: these vessels belong to the house of the LORD, consecrated to His worship, and that consecration is what Nebuchadnezzar violated when he set them in the house of his gods and what Belshazzar mocked when he drank from them (Dan. 5:2–3). The chapter's fixation on the vessels — named in verses 6, 7, 10, and 11, counted to the last knife — is a meditation on how God treats what has been consecrated to Him: it can be stolen, profaned, and exiled, but it is never abandoned, and in the fullness of time it is restored to its purpose down to the item. There is a personal edge to the word, too, for scripture calls people keliy: Paul was "a chosen vessel" (Acts 9:15), and the disciples are urged to be each "a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use" (2 Tim. 2:21). A soul, like a temple bowl, is a vessel set apart — and the God who counted five thousand and four hundred pieces of gold and silver back out of Babylon is the God who does not lose track of a single consecrated life, however long its exile.

From the Chapter's Architecture

This is not a chiasm, and it would be false to force one onto it — the chapter has no mirrored center, no returning frame. Its shape is a cascade: a single word of the LORD released at the top, falling through every level of reality until it lands as physical vessels moving up a physical road. But there is one deliberate structural signature — the doubled verb ur, "stir up," bracketing the human response, the spirit of the king stirred in verse 1 and the spirit of the remnant raised in verse 5. Those two occurrences are the chapter's load-bearing pillars: between them the decree is announced, and around them the whole machinery of return assembles. The architecture is saying, in its bones, that everything here — Persian policy and Judean piety alike — proceeds from the same divine stirring, and that the fulfilled word of verse 1 is the source from which all of it flows down.