

Experiencing Forgiveness

Key Verse: *“Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The LORD his God be with him, and let him go up.”*
—II Chronicles 36:23

Selected Scripture:
II Chronicles 36:22,23; Ezra 1:5-7

OUR LESSON BEGINS WITH

a proclamation, the result of which would bring to a close the seventy years of exile of the children of Israel from Jerusalem. The LORD raised up Cyrus, the King of Media and Persia, who, after having conquered the Babylonians, offered liberty to all of the Jews who desired to return to their own land. This decree would have little effect upon the vast majority of the Israelites who had gone into captivity. Their indifference was mainly due to the belief that it would be a disadvantage to leave their homes in Babylon to go back to Palestine, and deal with the inconveniences. Consequently, of all the number of the twelve tribes that went down to Babylon, only about 50,000 accepted the offer of Cyrus to return. These had learned the

lessons which their fathers had refused to learn. From the day of their return from captivity, there is no record of further idolatry in Jerusalem and Judea.

Many people experience forgiveness when they have done something wrong. How do we experience God's forgiveness? The Israelites knew God had forgiven them when they were allowed to return home and rebuild. Deliverance of fleshly Israel by Cyrus, whose name signifies 'sun' or 'brightness,' represents the deliverance of spiritual Israel out of "Babylon the Great" (Rev. 17:5), by the bright shining of the Sun of Righteousness, the Great Deliverer. The great deliverer is our Lord, and soon he will go forth to victory and establish his kingdom, which will cover the whole of heaven and earth.

Isaiah's prophecy distinctly marked out the return of God's favor to the Israelites, and mentioned Cyrus by name. (Isa. 44:26-28; 45:1-4) The LORD's word, from the mouth of Jeremiah, also told of the return of the Israelites from captivity after 70 years. (Jer. 25:12; 29:10) After a long journey, and bearing the costly vessels of the Temple service with them, they reached their goal. Psalm 126 pictures the returning of the Jewish exiles from captivity, "The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. He that goeth forth and weepeth, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing." (vss. 3,6) In the Ezra account, they return with the joyful sound of music, with a band of horsemen, and with "two hundred singing men and singing women." (Ezra 2:41-65) They would come to find that the Temple, and much of the city, lay in ruin. It required more than a year before they turned to the rebuilding of the Temple with the laying of the foundation stones. The priests and the Levites, dressed in their robes and making joyful noises before the LORD, represented the faith and confidence of the people in the precious promises associated with that Temple and that great city.

As we remember these faithful Israelites, let those who have been called as spiritual Israelites sing the praises of their King in appreciation of his grace and Truth. As the Prophet declares, "He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God."—Ps. 40:3 ■