# What God Can Do

**We Need to Start Believing God Has a Plan**

Ezra 1 & 2

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1. **Introduction (Isaiah 61:4; 58:12)**
   1. **Our study focus this entire year (2018) is on BUILDING and REBUILDING the things that SIN, and the devil has destroyed**
      1. Two great historical books of the Bible (Ezra and Nehemiah) help us see beyond the rubble of our situations, and see that anything can be fixed if we just start doing things God’s way
      2. We are switching from Nehemiah, to the book of Ezra this morning
      3. We will switch back and forth throughout the year
   2. **Our Limited Vision**
      1. We often see our lives through only our own eyes – our own limits – and through the failures that seem to pile up around us
      2. This life, this planet, this time is seen so differently, when seen from above – see through Someone else’s eyes, from HIS viewpoint
   3. **‘What God can do’ …**
      1. Is my attempt this morning to open your eyes to what God had been doing all along throughout the history of a tiny nation no bigger than Wales…
      2. So that you can start trusting the SAME great God, and rest in His plan for YOUR life, no matter the twists and turn
      3. A Christian is not a moral person, or a theologian – they are a passionate believer in the awesomeness of God – in the Almighty abilities of the Creator and Sustainer of this universe, who went to the extreme to save wretches like us.
2. **Background to Ezra**
   1. **Timeline (Before Christ, time counts DOWN…)**
      1. 700 B.C. The Northern Tribes of Israel are conquered by Sennacherib of Assyria
      2. 630 B.C. The Assyrians were conquered by Babylon
      3. 606 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar begins his destruction of the small nation of Judah
      4. 588 B.C. Jerusalem finally falls
         1. Nebuchadnezzar completely destroys Jerusalem – the last hold-out
         2. Takes almost everybody still alive away to Babylon as slaves
         3. Leaving the sickest and dying behind
         4. No walls, no gates, no glorious Temple of Solomon
         5. There is nothing but rubble, and burning heaps of ruin
      5. The land rests for 70 years
      6. 538 B.C Cyrus takes the throne of Persia and almost instantly proclaims the Jewish people are FREE to go back home!
      7. That’s where the Book of Ezra picks up
   2. **God HAD to Judge Them**
      1. **Judah had been Warned over and over from the very start that judgment was coming**
         1. First by Moses in the very laws that were to guide the nation of Israel
         2. Then by every prophet from Samuel to Jeremiah
         3. Hundreds of times, fearless men would stand in the centre of towns and villages and warn the people to repent and turn back to the God of heaven
         4. Almost ALL of those men were mocked and rejected, and beaten, and killed
      2. **Judgment was Long time coming**
         1. Not instant, like lightning - but God waited
         2. You and I had better be very thankful for His patience
         3. But we need to realize that God will judge sin, and he does it because he loves us and loves righteousness and purity and holiness (Heb 12:5,6)
      3. **Captivity was the judgment of God against His own people**
         1. Think about it
         2. Israel had turned away from God – turned from God to idols, to unimaginable sexual sins, to replacing the God who had saved them from Egypt’s salvery with gods of pleasure, of fear, of magic, and superstition
         3. Israel became a nation of liars, and thieves, and adulterers, divorcing their wives for anything and everything they could think of
         4. And so God judged them as guilty, and brought them to ruin
         5. By bringing king after king (like Nebuchadnezzar), and army after army, against this tiny nation of rebels
         6. And tearing everything down to the ground
         7. They had NO ONE to blame but themselves!
   3. **World Politics**
      1. Politics went on – as it always does
      2. Empires constantly rose and fell all over the world
         1. The Assyrians and Ninevites rose to power
         2. Only to be crushed by the Babylonians
         3. Nebuchadnezzar rose to power
         4. And then his grandson lost everything to the Persians
      3. Economic powers were built and then broken
      4. Never was this tiny nation of Israel the mover and shaker of the world
      5. No one cared what happened there
   4. **This was the world the nation of Judah dwelt in…**
   5. **But it was not supposed to stay that way.**
   6. **Israel’s Captivity Was Now Over!**
3. **Message**
   1. **The Heart of the King (Ezra 1:1,2)**

*Now we come to the part that exposes what only a Bible believer can see*

*That there is an unseen hand, at work in history. It is HIS-Story by the way!*

* + 1. **King Cyrus the Great (538 B.C.)**
       1. The very first year of his reign as king of the Persian empire
       2. Made a proclamation – public announcement throughout the entire kingdom…
       3. It was GOD in control – not chance, or fate, or an accident
    2. **The Promises of God at Work…**
       1. Isaiah’s Prophecies, 700 years B.C.
          1. Isaiah 44:28-45:7
          2. Did you notice Isaiah NAMED a king’s name 150 years BEFORE his birth?
          3. The fact that God named Cyrus 150 years EARLIER has led critics to say that Isaiah could not have written this, and was forged by a later scribe.
          4. But only a bias against the Bible would lead you to reject Isaiah’s prophecy.
       2. Jeremiah’s prophecies (600 B.C.) about an event 70 years in his future
          1. Jer 29:10-14
          2. Jer 27:22
          3. 2Chron 36:20-23
       3. I think it would be very helpful if all of US knew the promises of God for ourselves!
    3. **The Stirring of a Heart**
       1. “*The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus*”
       2. We all know how music can stir up our flesh, and words can stir up our emotions
       3. But notice that God stirred up Cyrus’ SPIRIT!
       4. This proves that God can work on anyone, anywhere!
    4. **The Proclamation**
       1. Kind of like ***the 1916 Proclamation*** that proclaimed Ireland's independence from the United Kingdom
       2. “The God of heaven made me what I am today – gave me all that I have”
       3. “And the same God has charged me with building a house/temple in Jerusalem”
       4. Whew! Wow! ***Wouldn’t it be awesome if a Taoiseach ever believed THAT?!***
    5. **Normally kings, politicians only build *THEIR* empires, their temples, their wealth**
    6. **But this king’s heart had been affected by THREE influences…**
       1. Ezra 7:27 “*Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which* ***hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart****, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem*”
       2. The word of God did that!
          1. Cyrus was shown his very name in a book 150 years old
          2. “I” too found MY name in this Book! It is found in…

Rom 3:23 “*For ALL have sinned*” – that includes MY name

Rom 6:23 “*The wages of sin is death*…” for everyone, including me

Rom 10:13 “*For whosoever shall call*…” THAT’S my name!

* + - 1. The Spirit of God did that!
         1. Oh how much we need God’s holy Spirit to work in our nation TODAY!
         2. Without the Spirit of God, no one would sense the weight of their sin
         3. Without the holy Spirit of God, no one would fear hell
         4. Without the Spirit of God combined with the WORD of God, no one would know that they could be saved if they only believed!!!
      2. The prayers of God’s people did that!
         1. Read **Jeremiah’s** pleadings with God – most of the book of Jeremiah
         2. Read **Daniel’s** prayers (9) for God to do as He promised to restore Jerusalem
         3. Countless others PRAYED and moved the heart of God to WORK
    1. **Which Would You Rather?**
       1. Exod 14:8 *And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt…*
       2. Or, Prov 21:1 *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will*.
  1. **The Call to Return (Ezra 1:3-4)**
     1. **Directed at God’s People**
        1. Not to anyone else – no one else would want to go back
        2. No one cared about the pile of rubble referred to as jerusalem at that time
        3. No one except those Hebrews, those people known as God’s people
     2. **Directed at People *Quite Settled* now in Persia**
        1. It was both inconvenient and risky to go back to Jerusalem. It meant saying good-bye to the comfortable and familiar surroundings and friends and venturing across 1,000 km of hostile desert to a land that had been decimated by war. There weren’t cities with beautiful empty homes awaiting them. There were piles of rubble and some hostile people who had moved into the empty land after the Babylonians had dragged off the surviving Jews 50 years earlier. So why go back?
        2. There were many Jews in Babylon who were comfortable there. Many of them had been born in captivity and Babylon was all that they knew. They heard stories from the old-timers about the glories of Zion and the beauty of the Temple. But they just shrugged, “Why go back there when we have a good life here?”
     3. **God did not just ASK - He Called!**
        1. Like when Mom calls for dinner… or when Dad calls you to come home! It is not a request… it is a command!
        2. Challenged, pleaded with, summoned, appealed to them to GET UP and get going
        3. To uproot everything, and move 1,000 km away
        4. To risk everything that they had gained and accumulated and built in Babylon and Persia, leaving it all behind
        5. To go completely by faith in God’s promises that he would go with them!
        6. Hmmmm. Reminds me of when JESUS came along and met Peter and Andrew and James and Matthew… (Luke 5:27,28)
     4. **Called Them to Return to THREE things:**
        1. **To the Will of God**
           1. God’s will was NOT for His people to be in the world, the culture of the world, nor to ever become the world
           2. They belonged in the land promised to Abraham
           3. God’s people belonged together, as a nation, as a people under God’s rule over and above man’s
           4. Act 5:27-29 “*And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men*.”
        2. **To the Work of God**
           1. To rebuild their homes and lives IN the will of God
           2. To rebuild their families as God intended – not like the Persians
           3. To rebuild their cities and their nation back from the rubble
           4. All of it was impossible, but could still be done!
        3. **To the Worship of God**
           1. We forget about this part most often
           2. We have so little concern for our worship of God – we feel that if we do anything, that God should be grateful, because we really don’t care about it much at all! And if he gets ANY of our time, or our worship, then he should just be grateful!
           3. Shame on all of us, that our worship is the last thing we care to focus on

Oh we will focus on fixing leaky roofs, and broken down cars, and messy family problems

But what about our lack of time with God? Whatever happened to that?

Does it even exist anywhere in Ireland today?

* + 1. **Let’s See What God Did Next**
  1. **People Responded (Ezra 1:5-2:2a)**
     1. **They Rose Up:**
        1. God affected MANY people’s spirits (1:5) - 42,380 people! (2:64)
           1. Gripped Leaders’ hearts, chief men. Raised up a great leader named Zerubbabel (2:1,2a), and also Nehemiah, and Mordechai
           2. Religious men. Later, God raised up a great preacher named Ezra
           3. EVERYONE whose SPIRITS had been stirred and motivated
        2. God attracted loads of WORKERS – not spectators, onlookers, wasters, pew-warmers
           1. Masons, diggers, bricklayers, and carpenters
           2. Thank God for hard workers who know the value of a life lived for GOD
        3. God raised up FAMILIES
           1. A whole lot of faithful Moms and Dads, husbands and wives rose up out of their comfort zones and answered God’s call as well
           2. God’s call is to everybody
     2. **And Many Others Helped**
        1. God made sure all the needs were supplied to accomplish His will
        2. Through PEOPLE – not with money falling out of the sky
           1. Not everybody could make the big move
           2. Some were not able to leave Babylon
           3. But ALL could give, and all could make sure those who were ready to go and do God’s will, were able
           4. So people encouraged one another – not discouraged (1:6)
           5. And they gave of their wealth
           6. And the king himself gave up everything that had been stolen 70 years earlier
        3. God showed Himself pretty awesome in the eyes of the world doing all this for an insignificant, back of beyond country called Israel!

1. **Conclusion**
   1. **A lot of People are STILL in Captivity**
      1. Maybe even YOU!
      2. Your parents warned you
      3. This preacher has warned you
      4. And so, there you are!
         1. In bondage to depression, to pornography, to anger
         2. In bondage to prescription drugs
         3. That’s what sin does to everybody
         4. And you really have no one to blame but yourself
   2. **It Maybe it hasn’t really affected you YET, but it will!**
      1. God’s judgment is NOT instant like lightning, but God waits
      2. You and I had better be very thankful for His patience
      3. People’s sins, superstitions, lying, thieving, fornication, adultery…
      4. WILL be judged
      5. Maybe not today, not tomorrow, but one day!
   3. **World Politics and Goings-On Don’t Matter**
      1. Everybody LOVES talking about all the politics going on
      2. The Bible believer safely laughs – none of it is out of GOD’S control
      3. Empires will rise and fall – all the doing of men!
      4. What matters is What is GOD doing!
   4. **The Stirring of a Heart – THAT matters!**
      1. “*The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus*”
      2. Those are amazing words!
      3. They offer amazing hope to everyone in this room this morning!
      4. 1Sa 10:26 *And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and* ***there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched***.
      5. Acts 16:14 *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us:* ***whose heart the Lord opened****, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul*.
   5. **Is God doing anything in YOU this morning? Stirring ANYTHING in you?**
      1. Has the word of God stirred your heart?
      2. Has the Spirit of God stirred your heart?
      3. I would wager that at least ONE person has been praying for YOU for years
      4. Well, If not, then, I am not going to bother you
      5. But if He IS stirring you up, then, well, glory to God!
         1. Then, Some souls can be saved, and some families rebuilt, and some broken lives restored, that Satan has trashed!
         2. THAT is what this BOOK is for! That’s what the Gospel (Good News) is all about!
         3. If Glod has touched YOUR heart, then we also can get down to the business of worshipping God like He deserves – not like your religion tells you, or like your heart tells you, but like He deserves!
      6. **Which Would YOU Rather?**
         1. For the Lord to HARDEN your proud heart like He did the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt?
            1. If you walk out of here the very same was as you came in, it only gets HARDER to feel something taking place in you – never easier!
            2. THAT ought to terrify you!
         2. Wouldn’t you rather for God to Turn your heart towards Him, and soften it, like He did Cyrus’ and all the people in Ezra chapter 1? That’s what REPENTANCE is!
      7. **God’s Call this morning is to Return to THREE things:**
         1. **To the will of God**
            1. His will is for you and I to follow His Son
            2. To BE like His Son
            3. To live different than the world around us and STAY different
         2. **To the work of God**
            1. And believe me, if you ever start living FOR God, it will be a lot of work
            2. To rebuild OUR homes and lives IN the will of God
            3. To rebuild our FAMILIES as God intended to be – not like Netflix wants to mould them
            4. I know that it will only seem impossible to fix your teenager, your wife, or your husband, your own sinful heart…
            5. But God CAN do it!
         3. **To the worship of God**
            1. We are called to WORSHIP the Lord – not just come to church!
            2. Don’t forget about this part!
            3. The precious Old Testament book of Ezra is all about rebuilding personal worship of God
            4. Not just prayer

But praise and thankfulness for every gift, every breath, every act of kindness that God has shown you when He should have killed you!

And the very lifestyle of just walking with God, enjoying His presence through every minute of every day!

* + - 1. **Do you even Know the Lord Jesus? NOT just in your HEAD, but, in your Heart?**
         1. He knows you!
         2. And He still loves you!
         3. Died to save you from the coming judgment!
         4. Romans 10:8-13

8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9  That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10  For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11  For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

12  For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13  For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

* + - * 1. Would you like to be truly SAVED, born again, forgiven this morning?